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BOILEAU

L'ART POÉTIQUE

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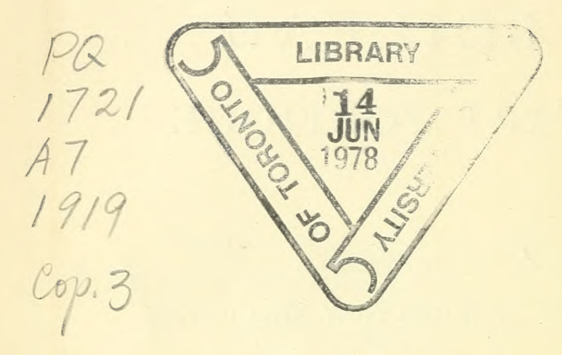
EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

D. NICHOL SMITH, M.A.

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PREFACE.

IT is hoped that the present edition of Boileau's *Art poétique* will be found useful by students of English literature as well as by students of French. It may at least claim to be not altogether superfluous, for, despite Boileau's reputation, and great as his influence once was, it is the first critical edition published in this country. The notes—for which considerable help has been obtained from the commentaries of Saint-Marc, Delaporte, and Gazier—are rather historical and literary than grammatical, though passages which are likely to present any difficulty in the language are explained. The spelling and punctuation of the text are modernised.

The part of the introduction dealing with Boileau's doctrine of poetry has been suggested to a certain extent by M. Ferdinand Brunetière's article in the *Revue des deux Mondes* of 1st June 1889 on the "Esthétique de Boileau."

Dr Henry Jackson has kindly read over the proofs, and to him, and to Mr G. Gregory Smith, I am deeply indebted for advice and suggestions.

D. NICHOL SMITH.

EDINBURGH,
7th October 1898.

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

BOILEAU'S LIFE.

NICOLAS BOILEAU DESPRÉAUX[1] was born in Paris on 1st November 1636. "Il n'y a pas peut-être d'homme en France si parisien que moi"[2] he could well say, for he was born in the very heart of Paris, and in it or its suburb Auteuil he lived almost all his life. He was the fifteenth child of Gilles Boileau, a registrar of the Grand' Chambre du Palais; and his mother's relations were likewise connected with the law. His childhood seems to have been unhappy. He lost his mother before he was two years old, and was left to the care of an unsympathetic nurse; and he did not enjoy good health, for an illness contracted at his first school, the Collège d'Harcourt, necessitated an operation which did not prove entirely successful. He was destined for the Church, and with this view was tonsured in 1647, and in 1652, on leaving his second school, the Collège de Beauvais, studied theology in the Sorbonne. But theology was not to his taste, and he fell back on the family profession of law. In 1656 he was called to the bar. His new career was even more uncongenial, and if he did plead once, it was unsuccessfully. A year later, however, on the death of his father, he was enabled to give up a calling for which he

[1] He took the name Despréaux—from a field (*pré*) of his father's property at Crosne—to distinguish him from his three brothers and a celebrated preacher of the same name. He signed himself Despréaux.

[2] Letter to Brossette, 8th September 1700.

had neither aptitude nor liking, and to follow the career of his own choice, the career of poet.

> Mon père, soixante ans au travail appliqué,
> En mourant me laissa, pour rouler et pour vivre,
> Un revenu léger, et son exemple à suivre.
> Mais bientôt, amoureux d'un plus noble métier,
> Fils, frère, oncle, cousin, beau-frère de greffier,
> Pouvant charger mon bras d'une utile liasse,
> J'allai loin du Palais errer sur le Parnasse[1].

The little he had already written gave no indication of the nature of his maturer work. It was, in fact, in the very style of those versifiers whom he was yet to ridicule[2], consisting of two drinking songs, an enigma, a sonnet, an ode, and some Latin verses. His real work dates from about 1660, when he began his famous series of satires in the manner of Horace and Juvenal, and in strict conformity with classical taste. In 1662, after two years' careful work, he circulated his first satire in manuscript, in accordance with the custom of the time. Others followed in steady succession and gradually won him the entrée to the *réduits* and *ruelles*[3] of cultured society. He refused however to publish any of them till the appearance in 1665 of an unauthorised volume made him determine on a correct edition. The volume appeared in 1666 with the modest title *Satires du sieur D****[4], and contained seven satires as well as the "Discours au Roi." The eighth and ninth satires and the "Discours sur la Satire" were added in 1668 in the third edition. Then came replies from the authors who had been attacked; but such passages at arms only strengthened the position he had already attained. He was now gradually winning the public to his side; but, what is of

[1] *Épitre* V. 108—114.

[2] The *Sonnet sur la mort d'une parente* as well as the later and more successful *Stances sur l'école des femmes* were printed in 1663 in the *Délices de la poésie galante des plus célèbres auteurs de ce temps*.

[3] See notes to *Art poétique*, IV. 43 and 200.

[4] D***, i.e. Despréaux. Boileau preserved his anonymity till 1701.

more immediate importance in the history of French literature, he had already won the friendship of Molière, La Fontaine, and Racine. For the four poets met frequently,—in each other's houses, or in the famous literary taverns *Au mouton blanc*, *A la croix de Lorraine*, or *A la pomme de pin*,—to criticise each other's work, and discuss literary matters, and reasoned out together much of the doctrine of classicism which was to find expression in the *Art poétique*, the "déclaration de foi littéraire d'un grand siècle[1]."

The *Art poétique*—begun in 1669 and published in 1674—must be considered Boileau's greatest work. Though it is inferior in certain aspects to the *Lutrin*, though its didacticism is sometimes almost forbidding, and its doctrines often timid or imperfectly expressed, the fact remains that it is really the keystone of Boileau's work. His satires are a preparation for it; his later work,—epistles, dissertations, or letters,—all harks back to it and substantiates and enforces its doctrines. So far he had been militant: he had attacked the bad poets and shown wherein their errors lay. Now that this ten years' fight had brought him victory, he had to replace what he had destroyed and lay down the laws of the new poetry. This was the motive of the *Art poétique*. The year of its publication is the most important one in Boileau's literary life, for the first four cantos of the *Lutrin*, in certain respects his best work, appeared at the same time, as well as his translation of the treatise of Longinus *On the Sublime*. The volume containing the first issue of these three works was entitled *Œuvres diverses du sieur D***, avec le traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit du grec de Longin*. It also contained his first four epistles.

In 1672[2] Boileau succeeded in obtaining the favour of the king. The "Discours au Roi" of 1666 had passed unnoticed; but the "Épître au Roi," the first of the epistles, met with better success, for it won him a pension and the royal favour. The

[1] Nisard, *Histoire de la littérature française*, Vol. II. p. 364 (ed. of 1844).

[2] Usually given as 1669. But see Gustave Lanson's *Boileau*, p. 24.

friendship of the king was naturally of the greatest importance to Boileau. It set the seal on his reputation as a poet, and secured his election to the French academy in 1684; but it also, by a curious consequence, forced him to abandon more or less the career of poet, for in 1677 he was appointed, along with Racine, historiographer to the king. Unfortunately their joint work in this capacity was completely destroyed by a fire in 1726; but it may well be doubted if they could have been successful in a work for which neither was suited. Boileau, however, would not abandon altogether the "métier de la poésie" as he calls it[1]. Five new epistles were published in 1683 (though these had been written before his appointment as historiographer), and also the fifth and sixth cantos of the *Lutrin.* Nevertheless his poetic work from this time forward is of small bulk, the remaining thirty years of his life producing only the *Ode sur la prise de Namur* (1693), three satires (1693—1705), three epistles (1695), and a few epigrams. Most of his extant prose belongs to this time. Instead of living peaceably in the enjoyment of a hard earned reputation, he chose rather to champion the literature of Greece and Rome in the famous quarrel of the ancients and moderns and to combat the views of Charles Perrault[2] in his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* (1693—1710).

The last years of his life were sad. After the death of Racine in 1699 he appeared less and less at court, preferring the quiet retirement of the country house at Auteuil which he had bought in 1685. Ill-health, to which he had long been a victim, as his letters to Racine show, was gradually increasing. "Je suis malade, et vraiment malade," he wrote in 1709[3], two years before his death. "La vieillesse m'accable de tous côtés. L'ouïe me manque, ma vue s'éteint, je n'ai

[1] In the preface to the 1683 edition. "J'y ai joint cinq épîtres nouvelles que j'avais composées longtemps avant que d'être engagé dans le glorieux emploi qui m'a tiré du métier de la poésie."

[2] See note to *Art poétique,* IV. 24.

[3] In a letter to Brossette, 7th January 1709.

plus de jambes, et je ne saurais plus monter ni descendre qu'appuyé sur les bras d'autrui. Enfin je ne suis plus rien de ce que j'étais, et, pour comble de misère, il me reste un malheureux souvenir de ce que j'ai été." Most of his friends were dead; and he had already so far outlived the great age of French literature as to see a decided decadence and a tendency to return to a taste which it had been his life's work to overcome. The chief literary friend of his age was Claude Brossette, an advocate of Lyon, who was engaged from 1699 in annotating an edition of his works[1]; but Brossette was only a fond disciple of no great talent. Shortly before his death, Boileau was himself preparing an edition which he intended to be complete and final; but he had the mortification to find that the Jesuits had prevailed upon the king to forbid the inclusion of the satire *Sur l'équivoque*, and, rather than omit this satire, he suppressed the whole edition[2]. About the same time he left Auteuil and came to live in Paris, and there he died on 13th March 1711. He was buried "sans faste et sans pompe," as he had desired, in the Sainte-Chapelle, the scene of his *Lutrin*. In 1819 his body was removed to the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

II.

THE CRITICISM AND DOCTRINE OF THE *ART POÉTIQUE*.

"Rien n'est beau que le vrai"—*Épître* IX.

The circumstances of the composition of the *Art poétique* go far to explain the nature of its criticism. After having satirised the dangerous tendencies which were at work in French verse, Boileau felt bound to replace this negative criticism by something positive and to fix the ideals at which the poet should aim. But this "législateur du Parnasse," as the

[1] Published posthumously in 1716 in two volumes.

[2] He made arrangements, however, for the publication of a complete edition after his death; it appeared in two volumes in 1713.

eighteenth century called him, was a satirist at heart, and even when drawing up an authoritative poetic code could not forego the opportunity of satirising once again the bad poets in whose faults he found the justification of his new rules. Hence the criticism of the *Art poétique* falls into two distinct categories. There is the estimate of the poetry of the time; and there is the statement of a poetic doctrine

The number of satirical references in the *Art poétique* is certainly greater than might be expected in a poem so didactic in intention. There are few paragraphs which do not attack, openly or covertly, some tendency in contemporary literature or some author's failings; and it is possible that some passages may have a critical intention which research and scholarship have not yet recognised. Among the more important points condemned in Canto I. are the conceits which Italian influence had made fashionable, the lack of classical restraint in description, the burlesque, and the whole work of the school of Ronsard; in Canto II., false taste in the eclogue, the artificiality of certain love poems, the heavy uninspired odes in the manner of Malherbe which were then so common, and, again, the Italian conceits; and in Canto III., the disregard of the three unities and other kindred rules of the classical drama, the mawkish heroes and *petitesses* of certain tragedies, the false descriptions in the novels, high sounding empty expressions, the inanity and bad art of contemporary epics, and the *grossières équivoques* of comedy. The satirical references of the *Art poétique* thus cover practically the whole range of contemporary French poetry as well as the Spanish drama, the Italian epics, and the epics of Statius and Lucan. They may however be roughly classed in three groups,—the criticism of the epic writers, of the précieux, and of the writers of burlesque.

About 1650, French poets were smitten with the laudable but misplaced ambition of producing a great national French epic and doing for their country what Virgil had done for Rome and Homer for Greece. Le Père Lemoyne published his *Saint-Louis* in 1651—3, Scudéry his *Alaric* in 1654, Chapelain

his *Pucelle* in 1656, Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin his *Clovis* in 1657, Le Laboureur his *Charlemagne* in 1664, and Carel de Sainte-Garde his *Childebrand* in 1666; and this is by no means a complete list. But these heavy compilations, from ten to forty-two cantos in length, were as artificial in treatment as in conception. An obvious straining after effect resulted in empty pomposity. Platitude followed platitude, now tricked out with a conceit or falsified by exaggeration, and the whole, despite an occasional happy passage, was the essence of tediousness. Boileau did not need to satirise these pseudo-epics, for they were already dying a natural death; but they afforded an excellent illustration of certain faults which he condemned. He singled out for special attack Scudéry's *Alaric*, Sainte-Garde's *Childebrand*, Desmarets's *Clovis*, Brébeuf's translation of the *Pharsalia*, and Saint-Amant's *Moïse sauvé*, though it should be noted, in justice to Saint-Amant, that his work was not entitled an epic but an "idylle héroïque": he did not criticise Chapelain directly, as he had boldly done in his satires, but the general remarks on the epic in Canto III. are directly applicable to the *Pucelle*. One and all he found guilty of a "sublime ennuyeux et pesant" and a "pompeux amas d'expressions frivoles,"—in a word what modern criticism calls *emphase*.

If *emphase* may be defined as the endeavour after effect by means of exaggerated statements and high sounding words, *préciosité* is rather the endeavour towards the same end by means of subtlety of thought and elegance of expression. They are somewhat closely related, for both have their origin in 'the search in surprise and astonishment, which they confound with admiration, for the principle of beauty'; and, when they are found together, it is often difficult to mark their exact point of divergence. French preciosity, like the poetry of the so-called metaphysical school in England, was greatly affected by the *concetti* of the Italians; but it could not have attained the importance it did, had it not answered to a strictly national tendency. For the seventeenth century was the great time of the French salons, those fashionable meetings of learned ladies and men of wit for the discussion of literary matters. They

soon acquired the reputation of tribunals of taste; and it became the aim of persons of talent to be admitted into them, and the aim of writers to merit their applause. They demanded a purely fashionable literature, conformable as far as possible to the ordinary rules of polite society. If they condemned boorishness, they also condemned bookishness, for pedantry was as much a sign of ill-breeding as bad manners. They wished nothing to be spoken about but what was of general interest, and they permitted only an elegant, correct, and lucid manner. To a certain extent the salons were a salutary influence, for they urged the claims of *form* in writing and thus helped in a way towards the final establishment of French classicism. But they also exerted a pernicious influence in forcing everything to be viewed from their stand-point and treated according to their taste. In the novels or romances of the period, such as La Calprenède's *Cassandre*, *Cléopâtre*, and *Pharamond*, and Mlle de Scudéry's *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*, the heroes are all reduced to a dead level of perfection, and appear, not as history tells us they were, but as gallants who might have dallied with the cultured ladies of seventeenth century society. Even in tragedy the heroes became "bergers doucereux" and "jusqu'à *Je vous hais* tout s'y dit tendrement." But the darling sin of the salons was the *pointe* or conceit, the result of paying more attention to the manner in which a thing is said than to the thing itself. As it lent itself easily to imitation it soon infected every form of literature. But it lent itself as easily to Boileau's satire.

Jadis de nos auteurs les pointes ignorées
Furent de l'Italie en nos vers attirées.
Le vulgaire, ébloui de leur faux agrément,
A ce nouvel appât courut avidement.
La faveur du public excitant leur audace,
Leur nombre impétueux inonda le Parnasse.
Le madrigal d'abord en fut enveloppé;
Le sonnet orgueilleux lui-même en fut frappé;
La tragédie en fit ses plus chères délices;
L'élégie en orna ses douloureux caprices;

Un héros sur la scène eut soin de s'en parer,
Et sans pointe un amant n'osa plus soupirer;
On vit tous les bergers, dans leurs plaintes nouvelles,
Fidèles à la pointe encor plus qu'à leurs belles.
Chaque mot eut toujours deux visages divers:
La prose la reçut aussi bien que les vers;
L'avocat au Palais en hérissa son style,
Et le docteur en chaire en sema l'Évangile[1].

It must be remembered, however, that the *pointe* was not the whole content of preciosity, as some criticism would seem to imply. It is more just to say that it was the vicious development, due largely to Italian influence, of the endeavour after an elegant and cultured style. Boileau could not have objected to the condemnation of the gross and vulgar or to the search for perfect propriety: on these points he was entirely at one with the précieux. But he could not brook the degenerate *pointe*; and it amply merited his bitterest ridicule.

The gross and the vulgar, the indelicate and untoward in style or thought, were the very qualities which Boileau was to attack in the *burlesque*, a form of writing much in vogue between 1640 and 1660. It was largely a reaction against the strict correctness of the school of Malherbe, the turgidity of the pseudo-epics, and the affected tone of the salons. In certain respects it offers an interesting contrast to preciosity; for while the précieux, the habitués of the salon, aimed at refining on truth and nature, the writers of burlesque, the habitués rather of the cabaret, sought to debase them. The two tendencies, however, often blend, either by preciosity falling, consciously or unconsciously, into the ludicrous, or by the burlesque chancing on an elegant conceit. They were certainly both affected by Italian influence: the very word burlesque was formed directly about this time by the poet Sarrazin from the Italian *burlesco*. Though, as a literary form, the burlesque was dead by the time of the *Art poétique*, it had brought about an influx of rude words and a tendency to the ludicrous which the stern upholder

[1] *Art poétique*, II. 105—122.

of *bon sens* could not but attack. Still Boileau could write with the confident tone of assured victory:

> Au mépris du bon sens, le burlesque effronté
> Trompa les yeux d'abord, plut par sa nouveauté:
> On ne vit plus en vers que pointes triviales;
> Le Parnasse parla la langage des halles;
> La licence à rimer alors n'eut plus de frein;
> Apollon travesti devint un Tabarin.
> Cette contagion infecta les provinces,
> Du clerc et du bourgeois passa jusques aux princes:
> Le plus mauvais plaisant eut ses approbateurs,
> Et, jusqu'à d'Assoucy, tout trouva des lecteurs.
> Mais de ce style enfin la cour désabusée
> Dédaigna de ces vers l'extravagance aisée,
> Distingua le naïf du plat et du bouffon,
> Et laissa la province admirer le *Typhon*[1].

The four great writers of burlesque in the seventeenth century were Saint-Amant, D'Assoucy, Scarron, and Cyrano de Bergerac. Boileau chose to satirise the first of these as the author of *Moïse sauvé* rather than of *Rome ridicule*. He singled out D'Assoucy, the self-styled "empereur du burlesque," as the feeblest of them all and the one in whose hands burlesque had no redeeming qualities. His attitude to Scarron and Cyrano de Bergerac was not so extreme. He could not forgive Scarron his *Virgile travesti*, and he sneered, in the passage quoted above, at his *Typhon*, but we know that in private he confessed to being pleased with its opening lines and to appreciating the *Roman comique*; and of Cyrano de Bergerac he says

> J'aime mieux Bergerac et sa burlesque audace
> Que ces vers où Motin se morfond et nous glace[2].

This was an admission of the claims of originality and vivacity. It is an interesting fact that the volume in which the *Art poétique* first appeared, contained also a burlesque by Boileau himself. But the *Lutrin* did not sin against propriety of

[1] *Art poétique*, I. 81—94. [2] *Ib.* IV. 39, 40.

language or elegance of taste, and moreover, as he was careful to point out, was of a different nature from the burlesques which he condemned : "C'est un burlesque nouveau dont je me suis avisé dans notre langue: car, au lieu que dans l'autre burlesque Didon et Enée parlaient comme des harangères et des crocheteurs, dans celui-ci une horlogère et un horloger parlent comme Didon et Enée."[1]

Truth to nature was Boileau's test for all poetry, whether society verse, grandiose epic, or trivial burlesque. It was by no means a novel principle. Pascal had already scoffed at those who employ speech only "to mask nature and disguise it"[2] and had shown in his own prose the power of simplicity and directness. Molière, besides teaching in all his comedies that truth to nature was the only rule of life, had definitely stated in his *Critique de l'école des femmes* that in comedy "il faut peindre d'après nature." And La Fontaine, as early as 1661, had said

Nous avons changé de méthode,
Jodelet n'est plus à la mode,
Et maintenant il ne faut pas
Quitter la nature d'un pas[3].

But it was left to Boileau to be the theorician of this new school and to define at the same time the doctrines of pure French classicism.

The *Art poétique* continually urges the study and imitation of nature.

Que la nature donc soit votre étude unique. (III. 359.)

Jamais de la nature il ne faut s'écarter. (*Ib.* 414.)

Il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux. (*Ib.* 1, 2.)

These, however, are mere injunctions. A reasoned explanation of principles would have been out of place in the *Art poétique*,

[1] *Lutrin*, preface of 1674.

[2] *Pensées*, vol. I. p. 250, ed. Faugère, 1844.

[3] Letter to Maucroix, 22nd August, 1661.

which is primarily dogmatic. This however is to be found in the ninth epistle; and it may be well to note in passing that while the works written previously to the *Art poétique* explain the bearing of the satire of the poem, the works written after it, and especially the *Épîtres* and the *Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, help rather to expound its doctrine.

Rien n'est beau que le vrai, le vrai seul est aimable[1].

La simplicité plaît sans étude et sans art.
Tout charme en un enfant dont la langue sans fard,
A peine du filet encor débarrassée,
Sait d'un air innocent bégayer sa pensée.
Le faux est toujours fade, ennuyeux, languissant;
Mais la nature est vrai, et d'abord on la sent:
C'est elle seule en tout qu'on admire et qu'on aime.
Un esprit né chagrin plaît par son chagrin même.
Chacun pris dans son air est agréable en soi:
Ce n'est que l'air d'autrui qui peut déplaire en moi[2].

L'ignorance vaut mieux qu'un savoir affecté.
Rien n'est beau, je reviens, que par la vérité[3].

"First follow nature" is Boileau's rule of rules. But it is modified by an important and characteristic reservation which distinguishes it from the common cry of so many literary schools.

For Boileau's second principle is that reason must have sovereign sway in every form of literature. Herein he is a close adherent to the Cartesianism of the century. To such an extent, indeed, is the *Art poétique* imbued with the principles of Descartes's epoch-making work that it has been called the "*Discours de la Méthode* de la littérature et de la poésie"[4]. What Descartes had done for philosophy by spurning the formal doctrines which he had been taught and by founding a doctrine of his own on thought and reason, Boileau endeavoured

[1] *Épître* IX. 43. [2] *Ib.* 81—90. [3] *Ib.* 101, 2.

[4] Francisque Bouillier, *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne*, I. p. 439. Boileau's relationship to Descartes is treated at length in Émile Krantz's admirable *Essai sur l'esthétique de Descartes*, 1898, pp. 91—233.

to do for poetry by leading it back to the study of simple nature and subjecting it to the strict rule of reason and good sense.

> Aimez donc la raison : que toujours vos écrits
> Empruntent d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix. (I. 37, 8.)
>
> Tout doit tendre au bon sens. (*Ib.* 45.)
>
> Au mépris du bon sens, le burlesque effronté
> Trompa les yeux d'abord, plut par sa nouveauté. (*Ib.* 81, 2.)
>
> La raison outragée enfin ouvrit les yeux. (II. 123.)
>
> Il faut, même en chansons, du bon sens. (*Ib.* 191.)
>
> Mais nous, que la raison à ses règles engage... (III. 43.)
>
> ...La scène demande une exacte raison. (*Ib.* 122.)
>
> Que l'action, marchant où la raison la guide,
> Ne se perde jamais dans une scène vide. (*Ib.* 406, 7.)
>
> J'aime sur le théâtre un agréable auteur
> Qui, sans se diffamer aux yeux du spectateur,
> Plaît par la raison seule, et jamais ne la choque. (*Ib.* 421—3.)
>
> ...Souple à la raison, corrigez sans murmure. (IV. 60.)
>
> Faites choix d'un censeur solide et salutaire,
> Que la raison conduise et le savoir éclaire. (*Ib.* 71, 2.)

These lines are but a selection. Boileau refers oftener to the rule of reason than to the study of nature ; but, different as these things may now appear, they had much in common to Boileau, and once at least he actually seems to identify them.

> Aux dépens du bon sens gardez de plaisanter ;
> Jamais de la nature il ne faut s'écarter. (III. 413, 4.)

It was not therefore the study of nature in all her forms and aspects that Boileau enjoined, but the study only of *la nature raisonnable*, that is to say of the essential and the general. The lower attributes of human nature were thus forbidden poetic treatment. As we have them in common with all animals, it is not because of them that we are men, and it would be an offence not merely against good taste but against reason itself for the poet to deal with elements in human nature which are

not distinctive characteristics of the species. In the same way the accidental must be eliminated. Though a thing may actually exist, it is not necessarily conformable to the general plan of nature. A man may be blind, or deaf, or lame, but in so far as he is so he has less in common with the mass of mankind. Likewise the ephemeral and the local must be eliminated. Such, for instance, are fashions. According as they are merely fashions, they do not answer to a general need of humanity and are but outward embellishments which may falsify the true nature they disguise. Once, perhaps, Boileau might seem to transgress his doctrine when he says

> Des siècles, des pays, étudiez les mœurs :
> Les climats font souvent les diverses humeurs. (III. 113, 4.)

But these verses are not a plea for local colour or antiquarian accuracy : as the context shows, they were meant only as a safeguard against the indiscriminate use of something so particular as the *esprit français* of the seventeenth century. Lastly, the author must eliminate everything that is of a peculiarly personal nature and deal only with those ideas and sentiments which he has in common with everyone, remembering that 'originality consists in being more and more completely than other people what they are or can be themselves'[1]. This view is fully borne out by a passage in the preface to the 1701 edition of his works. "L'esprit de l'homme," says Boileau, "est naturellement plein d'un nombre infini d'idées confuses du vrai, que souvent il n'entrevoit qu'à demi ; et rien ne lui est plus agréable que lorsqu'on lui offre quelqu'une de ses idées bien éclaircie et mise dans un beau jour. Qu'est-ce qu'une pensée neuve, brillante, extraordinaire ? Ce n'est point, comme se le persuadent les ignorants, une pensée que personne n'a jamais eue ni dû avoir ; c'est au contraire une pensée qui a dû venir à tout le monde et que quelqu'un s'avise le premier d'exprimer."

But how can the poet distinguish the constant from the variable, the principal from the accessory ? He has only to remember Boileau's third great tenet,—the imitation of the

[1] Ferdinand Brunetière, *Revue des deux mondes*, 1st June 1889.

ancients. If even now, despite wars and revolutions and the changes of modern civilisation, we can still understand and appreciate the literature of Greece and Rome, it must necessarily answer to something constant in man; and the poet has only to know that his views have already been expressed some two thousand years ago and approved by intervening generations to be assured that they are founded on nature and reason. This theory is still more or less indeterminate in the *Art poétique*, which, it must be remembered, is Boileau's earliest piece of doctrinal criticism; but it finds full and clear expression in the later *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* (VII.). The passage is so important that it must be quoted at length.

"Il n'y a en effet que l'approbation de la postérité qui puisse établir le vrai mérite des ouvrages.... Lorsque des écrivains ont été admirés durant un fort grand nombre des siècles, et n'ont été méprisés que par quelques gens de goût bizarre, car il se trouve toujours des goûts dépravés, alors non seulement il y a de la témérité, mais il y a de la folie à vouloir douter du mérite de ces écrivains. Que si vous ne voyez point les beautés de leurs écrits, il ne faut pas conclure qu'elles n'y sont point, mais que vous êtes aveugle, et que vous n'avez point de goût. Le gros des hommes à la longue ne se trompe point sur les ouvrages d'esprit. Il n'est plus question, à l'heure qu'il est, de savoir si Homère, Platon, Cicéron, Virgile, sont des hommes merveilleux; c'est une chose sans contestation, puisque vingt siècles en sont convenus: il s'agit de savoir en quoi consiste ce merveilleux qui les a fait admirer de tant de siècles; et il faut trouver moyen de le voir, ou renoncer aux belles lettres, auxquelles vous devez croire que vous n'avez ni goût ni génie, puisque vous ne sentez point ce qu'ont senti tous les hommes.... Au reste, il ne faut pas s'imaginer que, dans ce nombre d'écrivains approuvés de tous les siècles, je veuille ici comprendre ces auteurs, à la vérité anciens, mais qui ne se sont acquis qu'une médiocre estime, comme Lycophron, Nonnus, Silius Italicus, l'auteur des tragédies attribuées à Sénèque, et plusieurs autres à qui on peut non seulement comparer, mais à qui on peut, à mon avis, justement préférer beaucoup d'écrivains modernes. Je n'admets dans ce haut rang que ce petit nombre d'écrivains merveilleux dont le nom seul fait l'éloge, comme Homère, Platon, Cicéron, Virgile, &c.; et je ne règle point l'estime que

je fais d'eux par le temps qu'il y a que leurs ouvrages durent, mais par le temps qu'il y a qu'on les admire. C'est de quoi il est bon d'avertir beaucoup de gens qui pourraient mal à propos croire...qu'on ne loue les anciens que parce qu'ils sont anciens, et qu'on ne blâme les modernes que parce qu'ils sont modernes; ce qui n'est point du tout véritable, y ayant beaucoup d'anciens qu'on n'admire point, et beaucoup de modernes que tout le monde loue. L'antiquité d'un écrivain n'est pas un titre certain de son mérite; mais l'antique et constante admiration qu'on a toujours eue pour ses ouvrages est une preuve sûre et infaillible qu'on les doit admirer."[1]

Boileau did not follow the ancients blindly. His admiration of them was not pure fanaticism, as it was with Ronsard and the early classicists[2]; it was founded on reason. He was alive to their defects as well as to their merits, and in the *Art poétique* he actually satirises Statius, Seneca, and Lucan. And though it is possible that something of the traditional enthusiasm may still be present in the remarks in the same poem on Homer, Theocritus, Terence, Horace, and Virgil, he yet revered them above all as the truest followers of nature and reason. Consciously or unconsciously, Pope gave a bold but faithful expression of Boileau's doctrine in the interesting passage on Virgil in his *Essay on Criticism*.

When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t' outlast immortal Rome design'd,
Perhaps he seem'd above the critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:

[1] Boileau again expresses the same views in his famous letter of reconciliation to Charles Perrault (1700): "Permettez-moi cependant de vous faire ressouvenir que ce n'est point à l'approbation des faux ni des vrais savants que les grands écrivains de l'antiquité doivent leur gloire, mais à la constante et unanime admiration de ce qu'il y a eu dans tous les siècles d'hommes sensés et délicats, entre lesquels on compte plus d'un Alexandre et plus d'un César."

[2] Cf. Ronsard, *Abrégé de l'art poétique français* (1565): "Tout ainsi que le but de l'orateur est de persuader, ainsi celui du poète d'imiter, inventer et représenter les choses qui sont, qui peuvent être, ou que les anciens ont estimées comme véritables."

But when t' examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design,
And rules as strict his labour'd work confine
As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy them.[1]

The effects of this somewhat rigid doctrine may be stated shortly. The strict domination of reason led the poet to disregard exterior nature more and more and to consider that the only study for mankind was man. It prohibited realism, in the modern sense of the term, for this implies the representation not of the sane and general but of the exceptional and particular. It eliminated as far as possible the individuality of the poet, by confining him to the expression of what is common to everyone. It tended to proscribe two elements which are usually considered the prerogative of poetry—imagination and sensibility. Lastly, it led to the perfection of the form in poetry, for as the poet was concerned only with common ideas, he could excel only by the manner in which he expressed them.

It should be remarked that it is only Boileau's criticism of contemporary literature that is of any value. Nothing could be more hopelessly erroneous than his remarks on French poetry previous to Malherbe. He had his century's scorn of the Middle Ages and scoffed at them without taking the trouble to know anything about them. His accounts of the early French drama (III. 81 &c.) and the beginnings of French poetry (I. 113 &c.) are literally crammed with errors in the simplest matters of fact. There is absolutely no truth in the statement that

Villon sut le premier, dans ces siècles grossiers,
Débrouiller l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers;

for though Villon marks the beginning of the modern spirit in French poetry, he employed the traditional verse forms. It is wrong to say that Marot "montra pour rimer des chemins tout nouveaux"; and as to the form of the rondeau, which it

[1] *Essay on Criticism*, 130—140.

is implied he perfected, it had been fixed during the Middle Ages. The account of Ronsard and the Pléiade is likewise inaccurate, and has the additional fault of being prejudiced. But his judgments on the literature of the seventeenth century agree with the judgments of posterity. As a critic of contemporary literature Boileau has had few equals. He saw at once the inanity of Chapelain's *Pucelle*, the mawkishness of Quinault's dramas, and the absurdities of the romances, though these works were so popular and so much praised at the time; and on the other hand he insisted that the *Misanthrope*, despite its lukewarm reception, was Molière's greatest work, and he comforted Racine, who was depressed at the failure of his *Athalie*, by saying, "C'est votre chef-d'œuvre ; je vous soutiens que c'est votre chef-d'œuvre ; je m'y connais, et le public y reviendra." And assuredly *Athalie* is now considered "le chef-d'œuvre de Racine et peut-être du théâtre français[1]."

Boileau was indebted to Horace's *Epistola ad Pisones*, not merely for the idea of the *Art poétique* but also for much of its doctrine and many of its details: about fifty parallel passages will be found cited in the notes[2]. His indebtedness to Aristotle was not so great, and is noticeable chiefly at the beginning of Canto III. The influence of Longinus may be traced in the remarks on false sublimity in Cantos I. and III., but it is smaller than might have been expected, considering that Boileau's translation of Longinus's treatise appeared at the same time as the *Art poétique*. A footnote reference in Canto III. implies a certain obligation to Quintilian.

With regard to modern critics, it is sometimes said that Boileau was indebted to Julius Caesar Scaliger; but it would be difficult to point out precisely what he got from the long and

[1] Émile Faguet, *Dix-septième siècle, Études littéraires*, p. 164.

[2] As Nisard, however, well remarks, "tel est l'effet de la vérité des pensées et de la justesse de l'expression dans les ouvrages de Boileau, qu'à moins de notes qui vous en avertissent, on n'y peut pas distinguer ce qu'il imite des anciens de ce qui lui est propre." (*Histoire de la littérature française*, vol. II. p. 392.)

heavy *Libri poetices septem* (1561) of "cet orgueilleux savant," as he calls him contemptuously in his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin.* He may owe something to Marco Girolamo Vida; but though there is a certain resemblance between the poetics of the two poets, it arises not from Boileau copying from Vida but from both copying from Horace. The same remark applies to the *Art poétique* (1605) of Vauquelin de la Fresnaye. Some of the older annotated editions of Boileau tried to establish a connection by citing parallel passages; but Boileau probably did not know Vauquelin, and certainly he never refers to him. The similarity is sometimes remarkable; but it arises from both expressing a similar doctrine, recommending the same models, and drawing inspiration from an identical source.

III.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE *ART POÉTIQUE.*

"Du Parnasse français formant les nourrissons"—*Épître* x.

"Boileau, personnage en autorité, est bien plus considérable que son œuvre".[1] It was fortunate for Boileau's reputation that he was the theorician of the French classicists of the seventeenth century. Whatever the merit of his poetry, he would have won a comparatively meagre fame had he not consistently held up to other poets as well as to himself his rigid standards of correct expression and of truth to nature and to reason. He succeeded in identifying himself in a sense with the purest doctrines of classicism, and thereby gained an authority which the mere poetic value of his work would not have given him. It may even be said that the classical masterpieces of his greater contemporaries served indirectly to strengthen his reputation. It cannot for a moment be denied that Molière, Racine, and La

[1] Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, VI. p. 494. "S'il m'est permis de parler pour moi-même," says Sainte-Beuve, "Boileau est un des hommes qui m'ont le plus occupé depuis que je fais de la critique, et avec qui j'ai le plus vécu en idée."

Fontaine were poets of a higher order than Boileau. But as long as classicism held sway, Boileau was considered the incarnation, as it were, of the classical ideal and accordingly the supreme authority in literary matters.

If it was Boileau's lot to be troubled by the small fry of letters, it was his also to be the

"censeur solide et salutaire,
Que la raison conduise et le savoir éclaire"

of the great writers of the time, and in particular of Molière, Racine, and La Fontaine. It was he who impressed upon them the nature and extent of their particular talents, and, by his scrupulous taste, led them to a point of perfection which they might not have attained of themselves. "Saluons et reconnaissons aujourd'hui la noble et forte harmonie du grand siècle," says Sainte-Beuve, in a remarkable passage on Boileau's influence. "Sans Boileau, et sans Louis XIV qui reconnaissait Boileau comme son Contrôleur-Général du Parnasse, que serait-il arrivé? Les plus grands talents eux-mêmes auraient-ils rendu également tout ce qui forme désormais leur plus solide héritage de gloire? Racine, je le crains, aurait fait plus souvent des *Bérénice*; La Fontaine moins de Fables et plus de Contes; Molière lui-même aurait donné davantage dans les Scapins, et n'aurait peut-être pas atteint aux hauteurs sévères du *Misanthrope*. En un mot, chacun de ces beaux génies aurait abondé dans ses défauts. Boileau, c'est à dire le bon sens du poète critique, autorisé et doublé de celui d'un grand roi, les contint tous et les contraignit, par sa présence respectée, à leurs meilleures et à leurs plus graves œuvres."

The influence which Boileau exerted personally on his contemporaries was preserved to the eighteenth century by the *Art poétique*. The poem became, so to speak, the official code of letters. Its statements were taken as final in all points of literary doctrine. The poet was content to follow them obediently, and the academic critic found occupation in expanding and substantiating them. Boileau was put on the same level as Aristotle and Horace. In 1728 a professor at the Sorbonne, D. Gaullyer, published his *Règles de Poëtique, tirées*

d'Aristote, d'Horace, de Despréaux, et d'autres célèbres auteurs. In 1771 the more famous Abbé Batteux, the tutor of the Dauphin, compiled the two volumes of *Les quatre Poétiques: d'Aristote, d'Horace, de Vida, de Despréaux*, in which the four poetics are made to supplement one another and form a complete body of rules. "Si ces quatre législateurs des poètes sont d'accord entr'eux," says Batteux in a passage which, in its reasoning and its theory, might well have been written by Boileau himself, "si, malgré la différence des temps, des mœurs, des langues, ils n'ont tous quatre tracé qu'une seule et même voie; il s'ensuit qu'il n'y en a pas deux pour la poésie, et que la marche des poètes est réglée par des principes invariables. Comment ne le serait-elle pas, puisque celle de la nature l'est, et que la poésie n'est, et ne peut être, que l'imitation de la nature? On peut donc dire aux élèves de la poésie, et même aux poètes les plus célèbres, en leur présentant ces quatre ouvrages, voilà vos maîtres, voilà vos règles, d'après lesquelles vous pouvez et vous juger vous-mêmes, et prévoir ou apprécier le jugement du public." But Boileau was not to be kept merely on the same level as Horace. The literary dictator of the eighteenth century gave the preference to the French art of poetry over the Latin. "L'*Art poétique* de Boileau est supérieur à celui d'Horace," said Voltaire in 1764 in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*. "Si vous en exceptez les tragédies de Racine, qui ont le mérite supérieur de traiter les passions, et de surmonter toutes les difficultés du théâtre, l'*Art poétique* de Despréaux est, sans contredit, le poème qui fait le plus d'honneur à la langue française."

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the eighteenth century, while deifying Boileau, always understood him aright. It interpreted the *Art poétique* to its own taste. With the return of the domination of the salons, attention was paid only to those parts which seemed to encourage the polite, the artificial, and the formal. The salons applied to literature the laws of society—in which it is a sign of ill-breeding to court attention, and in which a man can excel only by unassuming conformity to its conventions—and ignored what

Boileau had said about genius, passion, and even particular talent. But their greatest error was in misunderstanding the fundamental theory of the *Art poétique*, and substituting for true nature an "improved" nature, where elegance and ease take the place of simplicity and directness. There was much talk of Boileau's rules; but the principle which had given them life was belied. The eighteenth century forgot that Boileau had said, at the very beginning of the *Art poétique*, that art is of no avail where genius is wanting, and that the limits imposed by art may sometimes be passed; and it exaggerated his plea for "correctness" into authority for the most uninspired formalism. "Il m'a toujours semblé," says Sainte-Beuve[1], "que ceux alors qui étaient les plus ardents à invoquer l'autorité de Boileau, n'étaient pas ceux qu'il aurait le plus sûrement reconnus pour siens." In the romantic movement of 1830 Boileau was the chief object of attack, but he was unjustly made to answer for the faults of degenerate disciples whom he would have satirised as severely as he did the Quinaults and Chapelains of his own time.

Throughout the whole of Europe, and especially in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and England, the *Art poétique* was considered authoritative. In England it played a very important part in the establishment of classicism. A verse translation by Sir William Soame appeared in 1683. It is of no striking merit, and is chiefly interesting from the English adaptations, due probably to the recommendation and help of Dryden, of the illustrations and references; but it was well known at the time, and was certainly carefully studied by Pope[2]. Previous to Soame's translation, however, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, afterwards Marquess of Normanby and Duke of Buckinghamshire, had endeavoured to supply an independent counterpart to the *Art poétique*. But his *Essay on Poetry*

[1] *Causeries du lundi*, VI. p. 512.

[2] This translation appeared in *The Works of Monsieur Boileau made English...by several hands* (1712), with "amendments, not only in the versification but the sense," and "some modern applications" by J. Ozell.

(1682) is very unsatisfactory. It is incomplete as an 'art,' for it deals only with song, the elegy, the ode, satire, the drama, and the epic; and the rules for each form are for the most part laboured imitations of Horace and Boileau. There is much truth in Warton's statement that Mulgrave discoursed on the different species of poetry "to no other purpose than to manifest his own inferiority." The value of his poem is purely historical. In its statements on nature, genius, judgment, good sense, and reason, in its ideas and even its phrases, it shows that Boileau's influence was immediate. Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* (1681) was a less ambitious and more successful work. As the subject was original and had little in common with the *Art poétique*, there was small opportunity for direct borrowing; but the excursus on the quack doctor (ll. 244—275) is copied from the beginning of Boileau's fourth canto, and the influence of the *Art poétique* is seen unmistakably in the idea and theory of the *Essay*. The same remark applies to the poem of a third peer, the *Essay upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* (c. 1700) by George Granville, Lord Lansdowne. It commends moderation and good sense, enjoining the "test of truth" and forbidding "intemperance" and the "wild extreme." It praises Sheffield and Roscommon as having given the pattern and set the bounds to English poetry, and declares that

Informed by them we need no foreign guide.

But neither Mulgrave nor Roscommon nor even Lansdowne would have written his *Essay* had it not been for the example of the *Art poétique*. Boileau's influence on this species of poetry was consummated in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711). It is unnecessary to remark on Pope's indebtedness; but it may be noted that the *Essay on Criticism* is practically the last of the poems directly inspired by Boileau and the first in which Boileau is mentioned. Addison's papers on literary topics in the *Spectator* show that Boileau's influence was not confined merely to the doctrines of poet-critics. But however much Boileau may have helped the classical movement in English

literature, his authority began to wane on the rise of Pope. He was respected and followed, but he was not considered the legislator of Parnassus; and in the literary criticism of the latter half of the eighteenth century, for example in the works of Johnson, he is referred to less often than might have been expected. Still he was not forgotten in the English romantic revival; and though it was chiefly Pope who was made to answer for the pseudo-classicists, there is a memorable passage in Keats's *Sleep and Poetry* where responsibility is laid on Boileau.

A schism,
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
Men were thought wise who could not understand
His glories; with a puling infant's force
They sway'd about upon a rocking-horse,
And thought it Pegasus. Ah, dismal-soul'd!
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
Of summer night collected still to make
The morning precious: Beauty was awake!
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile; so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it,—no, they went about,
Holding a poor, decrepit standard out,
Mark'd with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
The name of one Boileau!

This clipping and fitting is unfortunately often apparent in Boileau's own work. He was scrupulous to excess and was not

always master of that art which conceals art. His best verses are the very perfection of clear, vigorous, and precise expression; but there are too many occasions when he is "simple avec art," to quote his *Art poétique*, or when he unwittingly illustrates the great lesson he taught Racine, "faire *difficilement* des vers faciles." In his second satire he makes full confession of the trouble his verses cost him:

> Mais mon esprit, tremblant sur le choix de ses mots,
> N'en dira jamais un s'il ne tombe à propos,
> Et ne saurait souffrir qu'une phrase insipide
> Vienne à la fin d'un vers remplir la place vide:
> Ainsi, recommençant un ouvrage vingt fois,
> Si j'écris quatre mots, j'en effacerai trois.

Still in his *Art poétique* he could recommend only this careful workmanship:

> Hâtez-vous lentement; et, sans perdre courage,
> Vingt fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage:
> Polissez-le sans cesse et le repolissez;
> Ajoutez quelquefois, et souvent effacez.

It was this laboured care which made his verses so correct, and so succinct, and gave them, to a unique extent, the force of proverbs; but it also gave them sometimes hardness and harshness, and deprived them of spontaneity and the accompanying power of enticing the attention. In the words of Voltaire, "il manquait à Boileau d'avoir sacrifié aux grâces"[1]. Unlike Pope, he is never ambiguous; his meaning is always apparent at the very first reading. He was aware of the dangers of obscurity, and even uttered a warning against them.

> Si le sens de vos vers tarde à se faire entendre,
> Mon esprit aussitôt commence à se détendre,
> Et, de vos vains discours prompt à se détacher,
> Ne suit point un auteur qu'il faut toujours chercher.

But he forgot that excessive regard for simplicity may often lead to a very similar result; and certainly it deprived his verses

[1] *Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. 32.

of something of the power of suggestion. Moreover he had not the light and graceful touch which is the charm of his master Horace, and he shows little sensibility and less imagination. But none of these elements was required in the *Art poétique*, whose doctrine is the glorification of *bon sens*, and whose didacticism demanded in the first place the careful exemplification of its precepts on art. After all, the greatest merit of the *Art poétique* is that its marked qualities of clearness, logical precision, and graceful simplicity, make it, as French critics are unanimous in admitting, "l'une d'expressions les plus originales et les plus *adéquates* de l'esprit français"[1].

[1] Ferdinand Brunetière, *La Grande Encyclopédie*, art. "Boileau."

L'ART POÉTIQUE.

CHANT PREMIER.

C'est en vain qu'au Parnasse un téméraire auteur
Pense de l'art des vers atteindre la hauteur :
S'il ne sent point du ciel l'influence secrète,
Si son astre en naissant ne l'a formé poète,
Dans son génie étroit il est toujours captif ;
Pour lui Phébus est sourd, et Pégase est rétif.
  O vous donc qui, brûlant d'une ardeur périlleuse,
Courez du bel esprit la carrière épineuse,
N'allez pas sur des vers sans fruit vous consumer,
Ni prendre pour génie un amour de rimer :
Craignez d'un vain plaisir les trompeuses amorces,
Et consultez longtemps votre esprit et vos forces.
  La nature, fertile en esprits excellents,
Sait entre les auteurs partager les talents.
L'un peut tracer en vers une amoureuse flamme ;
L'autre d'un trait plaisant aiguiser l'épigramme :
Malherbe d'un héros peut vanter les exploits ;
Racan, chanter Philis, les bergers, et les bois.
Mais souvent un esprit qui se flatte et qui s'aime
Méconnaît son génie, et s'ignore soi-même.
Ainsi tel autrefois qu'on vit avec Faret

Charbonner de ses vers les murs d'un cabaret,
S'en va, mal à propos, d'une voix insolente,
Chanter du peuple hébreu la fuite triomphante,
Et, poursuivant Moïse au travers des déserts,
Court avec Pharaon se noyer dans les mers.
Quelque sujet qu'on traite, ou plaisant, ou sublime,
Que toujours le bon sens s'accorde avec la rime:
L'un l'autre vainement ils semblent se haïr;
La rime est une esclave, et ne doit qu'obéir.
Lorsqu'à la bien chercher d'abord on s'évertue,
L'esprit à la trouver aisément s'habitue;
Au joug de la raison sans peine elle fléchit,
Et, loin de la gêner, la sert et l'enrichit.
Mais lorsqu'on la néglige elle devient rebelle,
Et pour la rattraper le sens court après elle.
Aimez donc la raison: que toujours vos écrits
Empruntent d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix.
La plupart, emportés d'une fougue insensée,
Toujours loin du droit sens vont chercher leur pensée:
Ils croiraient s'abaisser, dans leurs vers monstrueux,
S'ils pensaient ce qu'un autre a pu penser comme eux.
Évitons ces excès: laissons à l'Italie
De tous ces faux brillants l'éclatante folie.
Tout doit tendre au bon sens: mais pour y parvenir
Le chemin est glissant et pénible à tenir;
Pour peu qu'on s'en écarte, aussitôt on se noie.
La raison pour marcher n'a souvent qu'une voie.
Un auteur quelquefois trop plein de son objet
Jamais sans l'épuiser n'abandonne un sujet.
S'il rencontre un palais, il m'en dépeint la face;
Il me promène après de terrasse en terrasse;
Ici s'offre un perron; là règne un corridor;
Là ce balcon s'enferme en un balustre d'or.

Il compte des plafonds les ronds et les ovales;
"Ce ne sont que festons, ce ne sont qu'astragales."
Je saute vingt feuillets pour en trouver la fin,
Et je me sauve à peine au travers du jardin.
Fuyez de ces auteurs l'abondance stérile,
Et ne vous chargez point d'un détail inutile.
Tout ce qu'on dit de trop est fade et rebutant;
L'esprit rassasié le rejette à l'instant.
Qui ne sait se borner ne sut jamais écrire.
  Souvent la peur d'un mal nous conduit dans un pire:
Un vers était trop faible, et vous le rendez dur;
J'évite d'être long, et je deviens obscur:
L'un n'est point trop fardé, mais sa muse est trop nue;
L'autre a peur de ramper, il se perd dans la nue.
  Voulez-vous du public mériter les amours?
Sans cesse en écrivant variez vos discours.
Un style trop égal et toujours uniforme
En vain brille à nos yeux, il faut qu'il nous endorme.
On lit peu ces auteurs, nés pour nous ennuyer,
Qui toujours sur un ton semblent psalmodier.
  Heureux qui, dans ses vers, sait d'une voix légère
Passer du grave au doux, du plaisant au sévère!
Son livre, aimé du ciel, et chéri des lecteurs,
Est souvent chez Barbin entouré d'acheteurs.
  Quoi que vous écriviez, évitez la bassesse:
Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse.
Au mépris du bon sens, le burlesque effronté
Trompa les yeux d'abord, plut par sa nouveauté:
On ne vit plus en vers que pointes triviales;
Le Parnasse parla le langage des halles;
La licence à rimer alors n'eut plus de frein;
Apollon travesti devint un Tabarin.
Cette contagion infecta les provinces,

Du clerc et du bourgeois passa jusques aux princes :
Le plus mauvais plaisant eut ses approbateurs,
Et, jusqu'à d'Assoucy, tout trouva des lecteurs.
Mais de ce style enfin la cour désabusée
Dédaigna de ces vers l'extravagance aisée,
Distingua le naïf du plat et du bouffon,
Et laissa la province admirer le *Typhon*.
Que ce style jamais ne souille votre ouvrage.
Imitons de Marot l'élégant badinage,
Et laissons le burlesque aux plaisants du Pont-Neuf.
  Mais n'allez point aussi, sur les pas de Brébeuf,
Même en une *Pharsale*, entasser sur les rives
" De morts et de mourants cent montagnes plaintives."
Prenez mieux votre ton : soyez simple avec art,
Sublime sans orgueil, agréable sans fard.
  N'offrez rien au lecteur que ce qui peut lui plaire.
Ayez pour la cadence une oreille sévère :
Que toujours dans vos vers le sens coupant les mots
Suspende l'hémistiche, en marque le repos.
Gardez qu'une voyelle, à courir trop hâtée,
Ne soit d'une voyelle en son chemin heurtée.
Il est un heureux choix de mots harmonieux.
Fuyez des mauvais sons le concours odieux :
Le vers le mieux rempli, la plus noble pensée
Ne peut plaire à l'esprit quand l'oreille est blessée.
  Durant les premiers ans du Parnasse français,
Le caprice tout seul faisait toutes les lois.
La rime, au bout des mots assemblés sans mesure,
Tenait lieu d'ornements, de nombre, et de césure.
Villon sut le premier, dans ces siècles grossiers,
Débrouiller l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers.
Marot bientôt après fit fleurir les ballades,
Tourna des triolets, rima des mascarades,

A des refrains réglés asservit les rondeaux,
Et montra pour rimer des chemins tout nouveaux.
Ronsard, qui le suivit, par une autre méthode,
Réglant tout, brouilla tout, fit un art à sa mode,
Et toutefois longtemps eut un heureux destin.
Mais sa muse, en français parlant grec et latin,
Vit dans l'âge suivant, par un retour grotesque,
Tomber de ses grands mots le faste pédantesque.
Ce poète orgueilleux, trébuché de si haut,
Rendit plus retenus Desportes et Bertaut.
Enfin Malherbe vint, et, le premier en France,
Fit sentir dans les vers une juste cadence,
D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir,
Et réduisit la muse aux règles du devoir.
Par ce sage écrivain la langue réparée
N'offrit plus rien de rude à l'oreille épurée.
Les stances avec grâce apprirent à tomber,
Et le vers sur le vers n'osa plus enjamber.
Tout reconnut ses lois ; et ce guide fidèle
Aux auteurs de ce temps sert encor de modèle.
Marchez donc sur ses pas ; aimez sa pureté,
Et de son tour heureux imitez la clarté.
Si le sens de vos vers tarde à se faire entendre,
Mon esprit aussitôt commence à se détendre,
Et, de vos vains discours prompt à se détacher,
Ne suit point un auteur qu'il faut toujours chercher.
  Il est certains esprits dont les sombres pensées
Sont d'un nuage épais toujours embarrassées ;
Le jour de la raison ne le saurait percer.
Avant donc que d'écrire apprenez à penser.
Selon que notre idée est plus ou moins obscure,
L'expression la suit, ou moins nette ou plus pure.
Ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement,

Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément.
Surtout qu'en vos écrits la langue révérée
Dans vos plus grands excès vous soit toujours sacrée.
En vain vous me frappez d'un son mélodieux,
Si le terme est impropre, ou le tour vicieux :
Mon esprit n'admet point un pompeux barbarisme,
Ni d'un vers ampoulé l'orgueilleux solécisme.
Sans la langue, en un mot, l'auteur le plus divin
Est toujours, quoi qu'il fasse, un méchant écrivain.
Travaillez à loisir, quelque ordre qui vous presse,
Et ne vous piquez point d'une folle vitesse :
Un style si rapide, et qui court en rimant,
Marque moins trop d'esprit que peu de jugement.
J'aime mieux un ruisseau qui, sur la molle arène,
Dans un pré plein de fleurs lentement se promène,
Qu'un torrent débordé qui, d'un cours orageux,
Roule, plein de gravier, sur un terrain fangeux.
Hâtez-vous lentement ; et, sans perdre courage,
Vingt fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage :
Polissez-le sans cesse et le repolissez ;
Ajoutez quelquefois, et souvent effacez.
C'est peu qu'en un ouvrage où les fautes fourmillent,
Des traits d'esprit semés de temps en temps pétillent.
Il faut que chaque chose y soit mise en son lieu ;
Que le début, la fin répondent au milieu ;
Que d'un art délicat les pièces assorties
N'y forment qu'un seul tout de diverses parties ;
Que jamais du sujet le discours s'écartant
N'aille chercher trop loin quelque mot éclatant.
Craignez-vous pour vos vers la censure publique ?
Soyez-vous à vous-même un sévère critique.
L'ignorance toujours est prête à s'admirer.
Faites-vous des amis prompts à vous censurer ;

Qu'ils soient de vos écrits les confidents sincères,
Et de tous vos défauts les zélés adversaires.
Dépouillez devant eux l'arrogance d'auteur;
Mais sachez de l'ami discerner le flatteur.
Tel vous semble applaudir qui vous raille et vous joue.
Aimez qu'on vous conseille et non pas qu'on vous loue.
Un flatteur aussitôt cherche à se récrier :
Chaque vers qu'il entend le fait extasier.
Tout est charmant, divin; aucun mot ne le blesse;
Il trépigne de joie; il pleure de tendresse;
Il vous comble partout d'éloges fastueux :
La vérité n'a point cet air impétueux.
Un sage ami, toujours rigoureux, inflexible,
Sur vos fautes jamais ne vous laisse paisible :
Il ne pardonne point les endroits négligés;
Il renvoie en leur lieu les vers mal arrangés;
Il réprime des mots l'ambitieuse emphase;
Ici le sens le choque, et plus loin c'est la phrase.
Votre construction semble un peu s'obscurcir;
Ce terme est équivoque, il le faut éclaircir.
C'est ainsi que vous parle un ami véritable.
Mais souvent sur ses vers un auteur intraitable
A les protéger tous se croit intéressé,
Et d'abord prend en main le droit de l'offensé.
De ce vers, direz-vous, l'expression est basse.
— Ah! monsieur, pour ce vers je vous demande grâce,
Répondra-t-il d'abord. — Ce mot me semble froid,
Je le retrancherais. — C'est le plus bel endroit!
— Ce tour ne me plaît pas. — Tout le monde l'admire!
Ainsi toujours constant à ne se point dédire,
Qu'un mot dans son ouvrage ait paru vous blesser,
C'est un titre chez lui pour ne point l'effacer.
Cependant, à l'entendre, il chérit la critique,

Vous avez sur ses vers un pouvoir despotique.
Mais tout ce beau discours dont il vient vous flatter
N'est rien qu'un piège adroit pour vous les réciter.
Aussitôt il vous quitte, et, content de sa muse,
S'en va chercher ailleurs quelque fat qu'il abuse ;
Car souvent il en trouve : ainsi qu'en sots auteurs,
Notre siècle est fertile en sots admirateurs ;
Et, sans ceux que fournit la ville et la province,
Il en est chez le duc, il en est chez le prince.
L'ouvrage le plus plat a, chez les courtisans,
De tout temps rencontré de zélés partisans ;
Et, pour finir enfin par un trait de satire,
Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot qui l'admire.

CHANT SECOND.

Telle qu'une bergère, au plus beau jour de fête,
De superbes rubis ne charge point sa tête,
Et, sans mêler à l'or l'éclat des diamants,
Cueille en un champ voisin ses plus beaux ornements :
Telle, aimable en son air, mais humble dans son style,
Doit éclater sans pompe une élégante idylle.
Son tour simple et naïf n'a rien de fastueux,
Et n'aime point l'orgueil d'un vers présomptueux.
Il faut que sa douceur flatte, chatouille, éveille,
Et jamais de grands mots n'épouvante l'oreille.
Mais souvent dans ce style un rimeur aux abois
Jette là, de dépit, la flûte et le hautbois ;
Et, follement pompeux, dans sa verve indiscrète,
Au milieu d'une églogue entonne la trompette.
De peur de l'écouter Pan fuit dans les roseaux ;
Et les Nymphes, d'effroi, se cachent sous les eaux.
Au contraire cet autre, abject en son langage,
Fait parler ses bergers comme on parle au village.
Ses vers plats et grossiers, dépouillés d'agrément,
Toujours baisent la terre et rampent tristement.
On dirait que Ronsard, sur ses pipeaux rustiques,
Vient encor fredonner ses idylles gothiques,
Et changer, sans respect de l'oreille et du son,
Lycidas en Pierrot, et Philis en Toinon.

Entre ces deux excès la route est difficile.
Suivez, pour la trouver, Théocrite et Virgile :
Que leurs tendres écrits, par les Grâces dictés,
Ne quittent point vos mains, jour et nuit feuilletés.

Seuls, dans leurs doctes vers, ils pourront vous apprendre
Par quel art sans bassesse un auteur peut descendre ;
Chanter Flore, les champs, Pomone, les vergers ;
Au combat de la flûte animer deux bergers ;
Des plaisirs de l'amour vanter la douce amorce ;
Changer Narcisse en fleur, couvrir Daphné d'écorce ;
Et par quel art encor l'églogue quelquefois
Rend dignes d'un consul la campagne et les bois.
Telle est de ce poème et la force et la grâce.
  D'un ton un peu plus haut, mais pourtant sans audace,
La plaintive élégie, en longs habits de deuil,
Sait, les cheveux épars, gémir sur un cercueil.
Elle peint des amants la joie et la tristesse ;
Flatte, menace, irrite, apaise une maîtresse.
Mais, pour bien exprimer ces caprices heureux,
C'est peu d'être poète, il faut être amoureux.
  Je hais ces vains auteurs dont la muse forcée
M'entretient de ses feux, toujours froide et glacée ;
Qui s'affligent par art, et, fous de sens rassis,
S'érigent, pour rimer, en amoureux transis.
Leurs transports les plus doux ne sont que phrases vaines :
Ils ne savent jamais que se charger de chaînes,
Que bénir leur martyre, adorer leur prison,
Et faire quereller les sens et la raison.
Ce n'était pas jadis sur ce ton ridicule
Qu'Amour dictait les vers que soupirait Tibulle,
Ou que, du tendre Ovide animant les doux sons,
Il donnait de son art les charmantes leçons.
Il faut que le cœur seul parle dans l'élégie.
  L'ode, avec plus d'éclat, et non moins d'énergie,
Élevant jusqu'au ciel son vol ambitieux,
Entretient dans ses vers commerce avec les dieux.
Aux athlètes dans Pise elle ouvre la barrière,

Chante un vainqueur poudreux au bout de la carrière,
Mène Achille sanglant aux bords du Simoïs,
Ou fait fléchir l'Escaut sous le joug de Louis.
Tantôt, comme une abeille ardente à son ouvrage,
Elle s'en va de fleurs dépouiller le rivage :
Elle peint les festins, les danses, et les ris ;
Vante un baiser cueilli sur les lèvres d'Iris,
Qui mollement résiste, et, par un doux caprice,
Quelquefois le refuse, afin qu'on le ravisse.
Son style impétueux souvent marche au hasard :
Chez elle un beau désordre est un effet de l'art.
  Loin ces rimeurs craintifs dont l'esprit flegmatique
Garde dans ses fureurs un ordre didactique ;
Qui, chantant d'un héros les progrès éclatants,
Maigres historiens, suivront l'ordre des temps.
Ils n'osent un moment perdre un sujet de vue :
Pour prendre Dôle, il faut que Lille soit rendue,
Et que leur vers exact, ainsi que Mézeray,
Ait fait déjà tomber les remparts de Courtrai.
Apollon de son feu leur fut toujours avare.
  On dit, à ce propos, qu'un jour ce dieu bizarre,
Voulant pousser à bout tous les rimeurs français,
Inventa du sonnet les rigoureuses lois ;
Voulut qu'en deux quatrains de mesure pareille
La rime avec deux sons frappât huit fois l'oreille ;
Et qu'ensuite six vers artistement rangés
Fussent en deux tercets par le sens partagés.
Surtout de ce poème il bannit la licence :
Lui-même en mesura le nombre et la cadence ;
Défendit qu'un vers faible y pût jamais entrer,
Ni qu'un mot déjà mis osât s'y remontrer.
Du reste il l'enrichit d'une beauté suprême :
Un sonnet sans défaut vaut seul un long poème.

Mais en vain mille auteurs y pensent arriver,
Et cet heureux phénix est encore à trouver.
A peine dans Gombauld, Maynard, et Malleville,
En peut-on admirer deux ou trois entre mille:
Le reste, aussi peu lu que ceux de Pelletier,
N'a fait de chez Sercy qu'un saut chez l'épicier.
Pour enfermer son sens dans la borne prescrite,
La mesure est toujours trop longue ou trop petite.
  L'épigramme, plus libre en son tour plus borné,
N'est souvent qu'un bon mot de deux rimes orné.
Jadis de nos auteurs les pointes ignorées
Furent de l'Italie en nos vers attirées.
Le vulgaire, ébloui de leur faux agrément,
A ce nouvel appât courut avidement.
La faveur du public excitant leur audace,
Leur nombre impétueux inonda le Parnasse.
Le madrigal d'abord en fut enveloppé;
Le sonnet orgueilleux lui-même en fut frappé;
La tragédie en fit ses plus chères délices;
L'élégie en orna ses douloureux caprices;
Un héros sur la scène eut soin de s'en parer,
Et sans pointe un amant n'osa plus soupirer;
On vit tous les bergers, dans leurs plaintes nouvelles,
Fidèles à la pointe encor plus qu'à leurs belles.
Chaque mot eut toujours deux visages divers:
La prose la reçut aussi bien que les vers;
L'avocat au Palais en hérissa son style,
Et le docteur en chaire en sema l'Évangile.
  La raison outragée enfin ouvrit les yeux,
La chassa pour jamais des discours sérieux;
Et, dans tous ces écrits la déclarant infâme,
Par grâce lui laissa l'entrée en l'épigramme,
Pourvu que sa finesse, éclatant à propos,

Roulât sur la pensée et non pas sur les mots.
Ainsi de toutes parts les désordres cessèrent.
Toutefois à la cour les turlupins restèrent,
Insipides plaisants, bouffons infortunés,
D'un jeu de mots grossier partisans surannés.
Ce n'est pas quelquefois qu'une muse un peu fine
Sur un mot, en passant, ne joue et ne badine,
Et d'un sens détourné n'abuse avec succès;
Mais fuyez sur ce point un ridicule excès,
Et n'allez pas toujours d'une pointe frivole
Aiguiser par la queue une épigramme folle.

Tout poème est brillant de sa propre beauté.
Le rondeau, né gaulois, a la naïveté.
La ballade, asservie à ses vieilles maximes,
Souvent doit tout son lustre au caprice des rimes.
Le madrigal, plus simple et plus noble en son tour,
Respire la douceur, la tendresse, et l'amour.

L'ardeur de se montrer, et non pas de médire,
Arma la Vérité du vers de la satire.
Lucile le premier osa la faire voir,
Aux vices des Romains présenta le miroir,
Vengea l'humble vertu de la richesse altière,
Et l'honnête homme à pied du faquin en litière.
Horace à cette aigreur mêla son enjouement:
On ne fut plus ni fat ni sot impunément;
Et malheur à tout nom qui, propre à la censure,
Put entrer dans un vers sans rompre la mesure!
Perse, en ses vers obscurs, mais serrés et pressants,
Affecta d'enfermer moins de mots que de sens.
Juvénal, élevé dans les cris de l'école,
Poussa jusqu'à l'excès sa mordante hyperbole.
Ses ouvrages, tout pleins d'affreuses vérités,
Étincellent pourtant de sublimes beautés:

Soit que, sur un écrit arrivé de Caprée,
Il brise de Séjan la statue adorée ;
Soit qu'il fasse au conseil courir les sénateurs,
D'un tyran soupçonneux pâles adulateurs ;
Ou que, poussant à bout la luxure latine,
Aux portefaix de Rome il vende Messaline.
Ses écrits pleins de feu partout brillent aux yeux.
  De ces maîtres savants disciple ingénieux,
Régnier, seul parmi nous formé sur leurs modèles,
Dans son vieux style encore a des grâces nouvelles.
Heureux, si ses discours, craints du chaste lecteur,
Ne se sentaient des lieux où fréquentait l'auteur ;
Et si, du son hardi de ses rimes cyniques,
Il n'alarmait souvent les oreilles pudiques !
Le latin dans les mots brave l'honnêteté :
Mais le lecteur français veut être respecté ;
Du moindre sens impur la liberté l'outrage,
Si la pudeur des mots n'en adoucit l'image.
Je veux dans la satire un esprit de candeur,
Et fuis un effronté qui prêche la pudeur.
  D'un trait de ce poème en bons mots si fertile,
Le Français, né malin, forma le vaudeville ;
Agréable indiscret, qui, conduit par le chant,
Passe de bouche en bouche et s'accroit en marchant.
La liberté française en ses vers se déploie :
Cet enfant de plaisir veut naître dans la joie.
Toutefois n'allez pas, goguenard dangereux,
Faire Dieu le sujet d'un badinage affreux :
A la fin tous ces jeux que l'athéisme élève
Conduisent tristement le plaisant à la Grève.
Il faut, même en chansons, du bon sens et de l'art :
Mais pourtant on a vu le vin et le hasard
Inspirer quelquefois une muse grossière,

Et fournir, sans génie, un couplet à Linière.
Mais pour un vain bonheur qui vous a fait rimer,
Gardez qu'un sot orgueil ne vous vienne enfumer.
Souvent l'auteur altier de quelque chansonnette
Au même instant prend droit de se croire poëte :
Il ne dormira plus qu'il n'ait fait un sonnet ;
Il met tous les matins six impromptus au net.
Encore est-ce un miracle, en ses vagues furies,
Si bientôt, imprimant ses sottes rêveries,
Il ne se fait graver au-devant du recueil,
Couronné de lauriers par la main de Nanteuil.

CHANT TROISIÈME.

Il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux:
D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable
Du plus affreux objet fait un objet aimable.
Ainsi, pour nous charmer, la tragédie en pleurs
D'Œdipe tout sanglant fit parler les douleurs,
D'Oreste parricide exprima les alarmes,
Et, pour nous divertir, nous arracha des larmes.
Vous donc qui, d'un beau feu pour le théâtre épris,
Venez en vers pompeux y disputer le prix,
Voulez-vous sur la scène étaler des ouvrages
Où tout Paris en foule apporte ses suffrages,
Et qui, toujours plus beaux plus ils sont regardés,
Soient au bout de vingt ans encor redemandés?
Que dans tous vos discours la passion émue
Aille chercher le cœur, l'échauffe, et le remue.
Si d'un beau mouvement l'agréable fureur
Souvent ne nous remplit d'une douce terreur
Ou n'excite en notre âme une pitié charmante,
En vain vous étalez une scène savante:
Vos froids raisonnements ne feront qu'attiédir
Un spectateur toujours paresseux d'applaudir,
Et qui, des vains efforts de votre rhétorique
Justement fatigué, s'endort, ou vous critique.
Le secret est d'abord de plaire et de toucher:
Inventez des ressorts qui puissent m'attacher.
Que dès les premiers vers l'action préparée
Sans peine du sujet aplanisse l'entrée.

Je me ris d'un acteur qui, lent à s'exprimer,
De ce qu'il veut, d'abord ne sait pas m'informer ;
Et qui, débrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
D'un divertissement me fait une fatigue.
J'aimerais mieux encor qu'il déclinât son nom,
Et dît, Je suis Oreste, ou bien Agamemnon,
Que d'aller, par un tas de confuses merveilles,
Sans rien dire à l'esprit, étourdir les oreilles :
Le sujet n'est jamais assez tôt expliqué.
  Que le lieu de la scène y soit fixe et marqué.
Un rimeur, sans péril, delà les Pyrénées,
Sur la scène en un jour renferme des années :
Là souvent le héros d'un spectacle grossier,
Enfant au premier acte, est barbon au dernier.
Mais nous, que la raison à ses règles engage,
Nous voulons qu'avec art l'action se ménage,
Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli
Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli.
  Jamais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable :
Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable.
Une merveille absurde est pour moi sans appas :
L'esprit n'est point ému de ce qu'il ne croit pas.
Ce qu'on ne doit point voir, qu'un récit nous l'expose :
Les yeux en le voyant saisiraient mieux la chose ;
Mais il est des objets que l'art judicieux
Doit offrir à l'oreille et reculer des yeux.
  Que le trouble, toujours croissant de scène en scène,
A son comble arrivé se débrouille sans peine.
L'esprit ne se sent point plus vivement frappé
Que lorsqu'en un sujet d'intrigue enveloppé
D'un secret tout à coup la vérité connue
Change tout, donne à tout une face imprévue.
  La tragédie, informe et grossière en naissant,

N'était qu'un simple chœur, où chacun en dansant,
Et du dieu des raisins entonnant les louanges,
S'efforçait d'attirer de fertiles vendanges.
Là, le vin et la joie éveillant les esprits,
Du plus habile chantre un bouc était le prix.
Thespis fut le premier qui, barbouillé de lie,
Promena par les bourgs cette heureuse folie,
Et, d'acteurs mal ornés chargeant un tombereau,
Amusa les passants d'un spectacle nouveau.
Eschyle dans le chœur jeta les personnages,
D'un masque plus honnête habilla les visages,
Sur les ais d'un théâtre en public exhaussé
Fit paraître l'acteur d'un brodequin chaussé.
Sophocle enfin, donnant l'essor à son génie,
Accrut encor la pompe, augmenta l'harmonie,
Intéressa le chœur dans toute l'action,
Des vers trop raboteux polit l'expression,
Lui donna chez les Grecs cette hauteur divine
Où jamais n'atteignit la faiblesse latine.
  Chez nos dévots aïeux le théâtre abhorré
Fut longtemps dans la France un plaisir ignoré.
De pèlerins, dit-on, une troupe grossière
En public à Paris y monta la première,
Et, sottement zélée en sa simplicité,
Joua les saints, la Vierge, et Dieu, par piété.
Le savoir, à la fin dissipant l'ignorance,
Fit voir de ce projet la dévote imprudence.
On chassa ces docteurs prêchant sans mission ;
On vit renaître Hector, Andromaque, Ilion :
Seulement, les acteurs laissant le masque antique,
Le violon tint lieu de chœur et de musique.
  Bientôt l'amour, fertile en tendres sentiments,
S'empara du théâtre ainsi que des romans.

De cette passion la sensible peinture
Est pour aller au cœur la route la plus sûre.
Peignez donc, j'y consens, les héros amoureux;
Mais ne m'en formez pas des bergers doucereux:
Qu'Achille aime autrement que Thyrsis et Philène;
N'allez pas d'un Cyrus nous faire un Artamène;
Et que l'amour, souvent de remords combattu,
Paraisse une faiblesse et non une vertu.

Des héros de roman fuyez les petitesses:
Toutefois aux grands cœurs donnez quelques faiblesses.
Achille déplairait, moins bouillant et moins prompt:
J'aime à lui voir verser des pleurs pour un affront.
A ces petits défauts marqués dans sa peinture
L'esprit avec plaisir reconnaît la nature.
Qu'il soit sur ce modèle en vos écrits tracé:
Qu'Agamemnon soit fier, superbe, intéressé;
Que pour ses dieux Énée ait un respect austère.
Conservez à chacun son propre caractère.
Des siècles, des pays, étudiez les mœurs:
Les climats font souvent les diverses humeurs.

Gardez donc de donner, ainsi que dans *Clélie*,
L'air ni l'esprit français à l'antique Italie,
Et, sous des noms romains faisant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant et Brutus dameret.
Dans un roman frivole aisément tout s'excuse;
C'est assez qu'en courant la fiction amuse;
Trop de rigueur alors serait hors de saison:
Mais la scène demande une exacte raison;
L'étroite bienséance y veut être gardée.

D'un nouveau personnage inventez-vous l'idée?
Qu'en tout avec soi-même il se montre d'accord,
Et qu'il soit jusqu'au bout tel qu'on l'a vu d'abord.

Souvent, sans y penser, un écrivain qui s'aime

Forme tous ses héros semblables à soi-même :
Tout a l'humeur gasconne en un auteur gascon ;
Calprenède et Juba parlent du même ton.
La nature est en nous plus diverse et plus sage ;
Chaque passion parle un différent langage :
La colère est superbe et veut des mots altiers ;
L'abattement s'explique en des termes moins fiers.
Que devant Troie en flamme Hécube désolée
Ne vienne pas pousser une plainte ampoulée,
Ni sans raison décrire en quel affreux pays
Par sept bouches l'Euxin reçoit le Tanaïs.
Tous ces pompeux amas d'expressions frivoles
Sont d'un déclamateur amoureux des paroles.
Il faut dans la douleur que vous vous abaissiez :
Pour me tirer des pleurs, il faut que vous pleuriez.
Ces grands mots dont alors l'acteur emplit sa bouche
Ne partent point d'un cœur que sa misère touche.
Le théâtre, fertile en censeurs pointilleux,
Chez nous pour se produire est un champ périlleux.
Un auteur n'y fait pas de faciles conquêtes ;
Il trouve à le siffler des bouches toujours prêtes.
Chacun le peut traiter de fat et d'ignorant ;
C'est un droit qu'à la porte on achète en entrant.
Il faut qu'en cent façons, pour plaire, il se replie ;
Que tantôt il s'élève et tantôt s'humilie ;
Qu'en nobles sentiments il soit partout fécond ;
Qu'il soit aisé, solide, agréable, profond ;
Que de traits surprenants sans cesse il nous réveille ;
Qu'il coure dans ses vers de merveille en merveille ;
Et que tout ce qu'il dit, facile à retenir,
De son ouvrage en nous laisse un long souvenir.
Ainsi la tragédie agit, marche, et s'explique.
D'un air plus grand encor la poésie épique,

Dans le vaste récit d'une longue action,
Se soutient par la fable et vit de fiction.
Là pour nous enchanter tout est mis en usage;
Tout prend un corps, une âme, un esprit, un visage.
Chaque vertu devient une divinité:
Minerve est la prudence, et Vénus la beauté.
Ce n'est plus la vapeur qui produit le tonnerre,
C'est Jupiter armé pour effrayer la terre;
Un orage terrible aux yeux des matelots,
C'est Neptune en courroux qui gourmande les flots;
Écho n'est plus un son qui dans l'air retentisse,
C'est une nymphe en pleurs qui se plaint de Narcisse.
Ainsi, dans cet amas de nobles fictions,
Le poète s'égaye en mille inventions,
Orne, élève, embellit, agrandit toutes choses,
Et trouve sous sa main des fleurs toujours écloses.
Qu'Énée et ses vaisseaux, par le vent écartés,
Soient aux bords africains d'un orage emportés:
Ce n'est qu'une aventure ordinaire et commune,
Qu'un coup peu surprenant des traits de la Fortune.
Mais que Junon, constante en son aversion,
Poursuive sur les flots les restes d'Ilion;
Qu'Éole, en sa faveur, les chassant d'Italie,
Ouvre aux vents mutinés les prisons d'Éolie;
Que Neptune, en courroux s'élevant sur la mer,
D'un mot calme les flots, mette la paix dans l'air,
Délivre les vaisseaux, des syrtes les arrache:
C'est là ce qui surprend, frappe, saisit, attache.
Sans tous ces ornements le vers tombe en langueur,
La poésie est morte, ou rampe sans vigueur;
Le poète n'est plus qu'un orateur timide,
Qu'un froid historien d'une fable insipide.
C'est donc bien vainement que nos auteurs déçus,

Bannissant de leurs vers ces ornements reçus,
Pensent faire agir Dieu, ses saints, et ses prophètes,
Comme ces dieux éclos du cerveau des poètes ;
Mettent à chaque pas le lecteur en enfer ;
N'offrent rien qu'Astaroth, Belzébuth, Lucifer.
De la foi d'un chrétien les mystères terribles
D'ornements égayés ne sont point susceptibles :
L'Évangile à l'esprit n'offre de tous côtés
Que pénitence à faire et tourments mérités ;
Et de vos fictions le mélange coupable
Même à ses vérités donne l'air de la fable.
Et quel objet enfin à présenter aux yeux
Que le diable toujours hurlant contre les cieux,
Qui de votre héros veut rabaisser la gloire,
Et souvent avec Dieu balance la victoire !
  Le Tasse, dira-t-on, l'a fait avec succès.
Je ne veux point ici lui faire son procès :
Mais, quoi que notre siècle à sa gloire publie,
Il n'eût point de son livre illustré l'Italie,
Si son sage héros, toujours en oraison,
N'eût fait que mettre enfin Satan à la raison,
Et si Renaud, Argant, Tancrède et sa maîtresse
N'eussent de son sujet égayé la tristesse.
  Ce n'est pas que j'approuve, en un sujet chrétien,
Un auteur follement idolâtre et païen.
Mais, dans une profane et riante peinture,
De n'oser de la fable employer la figure,
De chasser les Tritons de l'empire des eaux,
D'ôter à Pan sa flûte, aux Parques leurs ciseaux,
D'empêcher que Caron, dans la fatale barque,
Ainsi que le berger ne passe le monarque :
C'est d'un scrupule vain s'alarmer sottement,
Et vouloir aux lecteurs plaire sans agrément.

Bientôt ils défendront de peindre la Prudence,
De donner à Thémis ni bandeau ni balance,
De figurer aux yeux la Guerre au front d'airain,
Ou le Temps qui s'enfuit une horloge à la main;
Et partout des discours, comme une idolâtrie,
Dans leur faux zèle iront chasser l'allégorie.
Laissons-les s'applaudir de leur pieuse erreur;
Mais, pour nous, bannissons une vaine terreur,
Et, fabuleux chrétiens, n'allons point dans nos songes
Du Dieu de vérité faire un dieu de mensonges.

La fable offre à l'esprit mille agréments divers:
Là tous les noms heureux semblent nés pour les vers,
Ulysse, Agamemnon, Oreste, Idoménée,
Hélène, Ménélas, Pâris, Hector, Énée.
O le plaisant projet d'un poète ignorant
Qui de tant de héros va choisir Childebrand!
D'un seul nom quelquefois le son dur ou bizarre
Rend un poème entier ou burlesque ou barbare.

Voulez-vous longtemps plaire et jamais ne lasser?
Faites choix d'un héros propre à m'intéresser,
En valeur éclatant, en vertus magnifique:
Qu'en lui, jusqu'aux défauts, tout se montre héroïque;
Que ses faits surprenants soient dignes d'être ouïs;
Qu'il soit tel que César, Alexandre, ou Louis,
Non tel que Polynice et son perfide frère:
On s'ennuie aux exploits d'un conquérant vulgaire.

N'offrez point un sujet d'incidents trop chargé.
Le seul courroux d'Achille, avec art ménagé,
Remplit abondamment une Iliade entière:
Souvent trop d'abondance appauvrit la matière.

Soyez vif et pressé dans vos narrations;
Soyez riche et pompeux dans vos descriptions.
C'est là qu'il faut des vers étaler l'élégance;

N'y présentez jamais de basse circonstance.
N'imitez pas ce fou qui, décrivant les mers
Et peignant, au milieu de leurs flots entr'ouverts,
L'Hébreu sauvé du joug de ses injustes maîtres,
Met, pour le voir passer, les poissons aux fenêtres,
Peint le petit enfant qui va, saute, revient,
Et joyeux à sa mère offre un caillou qu'il tient.
Sur de trop vains objets c'est arrêter la vue.
  Donnez à votre ouvrage une juste étendue.
Que le début soit simple et n'ait rien d'affecté.
N'allez pas dès l'abord, sur Pégase monté,
Crier à vos lecteurs, d'une voix de tonnerre:
"Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre."
Que produira l'auteur après tous ces grands cris?
La montagne en travail enfante une souris.
Oh! que j'aime bien mieux cet auteur plein d'adresse
Qui, sans faire d'abord de si haute promesse,
Me dit d'un ton aisé, doux, simple, harmonieux:
"Je chante les combats, et cet homme pieux
"Qui, des bords phrygiens conduit dans l'Ausonie,
"Le premier aborda les champs de Lavinie!"
Sa muse en arrivant ne met pas tout en feu,
Et, pour donner beaucoup, ne nous promet que peu.
Bientôt vous la verrez, prodiguant les miracles,
Du destin des Latins prononcer les oracles,
De Styx et d'Achéron peindre les noirs torrents,
Et déjà les Césars dans l'Élysée errants.
  De figures sans nombre égayez votre ouvrage;
Que tout y fasse aux yeux une riante image:
On peut être à la fois et pompeux et plaisant;
Et je hais un sublime ennuyeux et pesant.
J'aime mieux Arioste et ses fables comiques
Que ces auteurs toujours froids et mélancoliques,

Qui dans leur sombre humeur se croiraient faire affront
Si les Grâces jamais leur déridaient le front.
On dirait que pour plaire, instruit par la nature,
Homère ait à Vénus dérobé sa ceinture.
Son livre est d'agréments un fertile trésor:
Tout ce qu'il a touché se convertit en or;
Tout reçoit dans ses mains une nouvelle grâce;
Partout il divertit, et jamais il ne lasse.
Une heureuse chaleur anime ses discours:
Il ne s'égare point en de trop longs détours;
Sans garder dans ses vers un ordre méthodique,
Son sujet de soi-même et s'arrange et s'explique;
Tout, sans faire d'apprêts, s'y prépare aisément;
Chaque vers, chaque mot court à l'événement.
Aimez donc ses écrits, mais d'un amour sincère:
C'est avoir profité que de savoir s'y plaire.
Un poème excellent, où tout marche et se suit,
N'est pas de ces travaux qu'un caprice produit:
Il veut du temps, des soins; et ce pénible ouvrage
Jamais d'un écolier ne fut l'apprentissage.
Mais souvent parmi nous un poète sans art,
Qu'un beau feu quelquefois échauffa par hasard,
Enflant d'un vain orgueil son esprit chimérique,
Fièrement prend en main la trompette héroïque:
Sa muse déréglée, en ses vers vagabonds,
Ne s'élève jamais que par sauts et par bonds;
Et son feu, dépourvu de sens et de lecture,
S'éteint à chaque pas, faute de nourriture.
Mais en vain le public, prompt à le mépriser,
De son mérite faux le veut désabuser;
Lui-même, applaudissant à son maigre génie,
Se donne par ses mains l'encens qu'on lui dénie:
Virgile, au prix de lui, n'a point d'invention;
Homère n'entend point la noble fiction.

Si contre cet arrêt le siècle se rebelle,
A la postérité d'abord il en appelle :
Mais attendant qu'ici le bon sens de retour
Ramène triomphants ses ouvrages au jour,
Leurs tas, au magasin, cachés à la lumière,
Combattent tristement les vers et la poussière.
Laissons-les donc entre eux s'escrimer en repos,
Et, sans nous égarer, suivons notre propos.

Des succès fortunés du spectacle tragique
Dans Athènes naquit la comédie antique.
Là le Grec, né moqueur, par mille jeux plaisants
Distilla le venin de ses traits médisants.
Aux accès insolents d'une bouffonne joie
La sagesse, l'esprit, l'honneur furent en proie.
On vit par le public un poète avoué
S'enrichir aux dépens du mérite joué,
Et Socrate par lui, dans un chœur de nuées,
D'un vil amas de peuple attirer les huées.
Enfin de la licence on arrêta le cours :
Le magistrat des lois emprunta le secours,
Et, rendant par édit les poètes plus sages,
Défendit de marquer les noms et les visages.
Le théâtre perdit son antique fureur ;
La comédie apprit à rire sans aigreur,
Sans fiel et sans venin sut instruire et reprendre,
Et plut innocemment dans les vers de Ménandre.
Chacun, peint avec art dans ce nouveau miroir,
S'y vit avec plaisir, ou crut ne s'y point voir :
L'avare, des premiers, rit du tableau fidèle
D'un avare souvent tracé sur son modèle ;
Et mille fois un fat finement exprimé
Méconnut le portrait sur lui-même formé.

Que la nature donc soit votre étude unique,
Auteurs qui prétendez aux honneurs du comique.

Quiconque voit bien l'homme, et, d'un esprit profond,
De tant de cœurs cachés a pénétré le fond;
Qui sait bien ce que c'est qu'un prodigue, un avare,
Un honnête homme, un fat, un jaloux, un bizarre,
Sur une scène heureuse il peut les étaler,
Et les faire à nos yeux vivre, agir, et parler.
Présentez-en partout les images naïves;
Que chacun y soit peint des couleurs les plus vives.
La nature, féconde en bizarres portraits,
Dans chaque âme est marquée à de différents traits;
Un geste la découvre, un rien la fait paraître:
Mais tout esprit n'a pas des yeux pour la connaître.
  Le temps, qui change tout, change aussi nos humeurs:
Chaque âge a ses plaisirs, son esprit, et ses mœurs.
Un jeune homme, toujours bouillant dans ses caprices,
Est prompt à recevoir l'impression des vices,
Est vain dans ses discours, volage en ses désirs,
Rétif à la censure, et fou dans les plaisirs.
L'âge viril, plus mûr, inspire un air plus sage,
Se pousse auprès des grands, s'intrigue, se ménage,
Contre les coups du sort songe à se maintenir,
Et loin dans le présent regarde l'avenir.
La vieillesse chagrine incessamment amasse,
Garde, non pas pour soi, les trésors qu'elle entasse,
Marche en tous ses desseins d'un pas lent et glacé,
Toujours plaint le présent et vante le passé,
Inhabile aux plaisirs dont la jeunesse abuse,
Blâme en eux les douceurs que l'âge lui refuse.
Ne faites point parler vos acteurs au hasard,
Un vieillard en jeune homme, un jeune homme en vieillard.
  Étudiez la cour et connaissez la ville;
L'une et l'autre est toujours en modèles fertile.
C'est par là que Molière, illustrant ses écrits,
Peut-être de son art eût remporté le prix,

Si, moins ami du peuple, en ses doctes peintures
Il n'eût point fait souvent grimacer ses figures,
Quitté, pour le bouffon, l'agréable et le fin,
Et sans honte à Térence allié Tabarin.
Dans ce sac ridicule où Scapin s'enveloppe
Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du *Misanthrope.*
Le comique, ennemi des soupirs et des pleurs,
N'admet point en ses vers de tragiques douleurs;
Mais son emploi n'est pas d'aller, dans une place,
De mots sales et bas charmer la populace.
Il faut que ses acteurs badinent noblement;
Que son nœud bien formé se dénoue aisément;
Que l'action, marchant où la raison la guide,
Ne se perde jamais dans une scène vide;
Que son style humble et doux se relève à propos;
Que ses discours, partout fertiles en bons mots,
Soient pleins de passions finement maniées,
Et les scènes toujours l'une à l'autre liées.
Aux dépens du bon sens gardez de plaisanter:
Jamais de la nature il ne faut s'écarter.
Contemplez de quel air un père dans Térence
Vient d'un fils amoureux gourmander l'imprudence;
De quel air cet amant écoute ses leçons,
Et court chez sa maîtresse oublier ces chansons.
Ce n'est pas un portrait, une image semblable:
C'est un amant, un fils, un père véritable.
J'aime sur le théâtre un agréable auteur
Qui, sans se diffamer aux yeux du spectateur,
Plaît par la raison seule, et jamais ne la choque.
Mais pour un faux plaisant, à grossière équivoque,
Qui pour me divertir n'a que la saleté,
Qu'il s'en aille, s'il veut, sur deux tréteaux monté,
Amusant le Pont-Neuf de ses sornettes fades,
Aux laquais assemblés jouer ses mascarades.

CHANT QUATRIÈME.

Dans Florence jadis vivait un médecin,
Savant hâbleur, dit-on, et célèbre assassin.
Lui seul y fit longtemps la publique misère:
Là le fils orphelin lui redemande un père;
Ici le frère pleure un frère empoisonné;
L'un meurt vide de sang, l'autre plein de séné;
Le rhume à son aspect se change en pleurésie,
Et par lui la migraine est bientôt frénésie.
Il quitte enfin la ville, en tous lieux détesté.
De tous ses amis morts un seul ami resté
Le mène en sa maison de superbe structure:
C'était un riche abbé, fou de l'architecture.
Le médecin d'abord semble né dans cet art,
Déjà de bâtiments parle comme Mansard:
D'un salon qu'on élève il condamne la face;
Au vestibule obscur il marque une autre place;
Approuve l'escalier tourné d'autre façon.
Son ami le conçoit et mande son maçon.
Le maçon vient, écoute, approuve, et se corrige.
Enfin, pour abréger un si plaisant prodige,
Notre assassin renonce à son art inhumain,
Et désormais, la règle et l'équerre à la main,
Laissant de Galien la science suspecte,
De méchant médecin devient bon architecte.
  Son exemple est pour nous un précepte excellent.
Soyez plutôt maçon, si c'est votre talent,
Ouvrier estimé dans un art nécessaire,

Qu'écrivain du commun et poète vulgaire.
Il est dans tout autre art des degrés différents,
On peut avec honneur remplir les seconds rangs ;
Mais dans l'art dangereux de rimer et d'écrire
Il n'est point de degrés du médiocre au pire :
Qui dit froid écrivain dit détestable auteur.
Boyer est à Pinchêne égal pour le lecteur ;
On ne lit guère plus Rampale et Ménardière
Que Magnon, du Souhait, Corbin, et La Morlière.
Un fou du moins fait rire et peut nous égayer ;
Mais un froid écrivain ne sait rien qu'ennuyer.
J'aime mieux Bergerac et sa burlesque audace
Que ces vers où Motin se morfond et nous glace.
Ne vous enivrez point des éloges flatteurs
Qu'un amas quelquefois de vains admirateurs
Vous donne en ces réduits, prompts à crier merveille !
Tel écrit récité se soutint à l'oreille,
Qui, dans l'impression au grand jour se montrant,
Ne soutient pas des yeux le regard pénétrant.
On sait de cent auteurs l'aventure tragique :
Et Gombauld tant loué garde encor la boutique.
Écoutez tout le monde, assidu consultant :
Un fat quelquefois ouvre un avis important.
Quelques vers toutefois qu'Apollon vous inspire,
En tous lieux aussitôt ne courez pas les lire.
Gardez-vous d'imiter ce rimeur furieux
Qui, de ses vains écrits lecteur harmonieux,
Aborde en récitant quiconque le salue,
Et poursuit de ses vers les passants dans la rue.
Il n'est temple si saint, des anges respecté,
Qui soit contre sa muse un lieu de sûreté.
Je vous l'ai déjà dit, aimez qu'on vous censure,
Et, souple à la raison, corrigez sans murmure.

Mais ne vous rendez pas dès qu'un sot vous reprend.
  Souvent dans son orgueil un subtil ignorant
Par d'injustes dégoûts combat toute une pièce,
Blâme des plus beaux vers la noble hardiesse.
On a beau réfuter ses vains raisonnements :
Son esprit se complaît dans ses faux jugements,
Et sa faible raison, de clarté dépourvue,
Pense que rien n'échappe à sa débile vue.
Ses conseils sont à craindre ; et, si vous les croyez,
Pensant fuir un écueil, souvent vous vous noyez.
  Faites choix d'un censeur solide et salutaire,
Que la raison conduise et le savoir éclaire,
Et dont le crayon sûr d'abord aille chercher
L'endroit que l'on sent faible et qu'on se veut cacher.
Lui seul éclaircira vos doutes ridicules,
De votre esprit tremblant lèvera les scrupules ;
C'est lui qui vous dira par quel transport heureux
Quelquefois dans sa course un esprit vigoureux,
Trop resserré par l'art, sort des règles prescrites,
Et de l'art même apprend à franchir leurs limites.
Mais ce parfait censeur se trouve rarement :
Tel excelle à rimer qui juge sottement ;
Tel s'est fait par ses vers distinguer dans la ville,
Qui jamais de Lucain n'a distingué Virgile.
  Auteurs, prêtez l'oreille à mes instructions.
Voulez-vous faire aimer vos riches fictions ?
Qu'en savantes leçons votre muse fertile
Partout joigne au plaisant le solide et l'utile.
Un lecteur sage fuit un vain amusement,
Et veut mettre à profit son divertissement.
  Que votre âme et vos mœurs, peintes dans vos ouvrages,
N'offrent jamais de vous que de nobles images.
Je ne puis estimer ces dangereux auteurs

Qui, de l'honneur, en vers, infâmes déserteurs,
Trahissant la vertu sur un papier coupable,
Aux yeux de leurs lecteurs rendent le vice aimable.
Je ne suis pas pourtant de ces tristes esprits
Qui, bannissant l'amour de tous chastes écrits,
D'un si riche ornement veulent priver la scène,
Traitent d'empoisonneurs et Rodrigue et Chimène.
L'amour le moins honnête, exprimé chastement,
N'excite point en nous de honteux mouvement.
Didon a beau gémir et m'étaler ses charmes;
Je condamne sa faute en partageant ses larmes.
Un auteur vertueux, dans ses vers innocents,
Ne corrompt point le cœur en chatouillant les sens:
Son feu n'allume point de criminelle flamme.
Aimez donc la vertu, nourrissez-en votre âme:
En vain l'esprit est plein d'une noble vigueur;
Le vers se sent toujours des bassesses du cœur.
Fuyez surtout, fuyez ces basses jalousies,
Des vulgaires esprits malignes frénésies.
Un sublime écrivain n'en peut être infecté;
C'est un vice qui suit la médiocrité.
Du mérite éclatant cette sombre rivale
Contre lui chez les grands incessamment cabale,
Et, sur les pieds en vain tâchant de se hausser,
Pour s'égaler à lui cherche à le rabaisser.
Ne descendons jamais dans ces lâches intrigues:
N'allons point à l'honneur par de honteuses brigues.
Que les vers ne soient pas votre éternel emploi:
Cultivez vos amis, soyez homme de foi.
C'est peu d'être agréable et charmant dans un livre;
Il faut savoir encore et converser et vivre.
Travaillez pour la gloire, et qu'un sordide gain
Ne soit jamais l'objet d'un illustre écrivain.

Je sais qu'un noble esprit peut, sans honte et sans crime,
Tirer de son travail un tribut légitime ;
Mais je ne puis souffrir ces auteurs renommés,
Qui, dégoûtés de gloire et d'argent affamés,
Mettent leur Apollon aux gages d'un libraire,
Et font d'un art divin un métier mercenaire.

Avant que la raison, s'expliquant par la voix,
Eût instruit les humains, eût enseigné des lois,
Tous les hommes suivaient la grossière nature,
Dispersés dans les bois couraient à la pâture :
La force tenait lieu de droit et d'équité ;
Le meurtre s'exerçait avec impunité.
Mais du discours enfin l'harmonieuse adresse
De ces sauvages mœurs adoucit la rudesse,
Rassembla les humains dans les forêts épars,
Enferma les cités de murs et de remparts,
De l'aspect du supplice effraya l'insolence,
Et sous l'appui des lois mit la faible innocence.
Cet ordre fut, dit-on, le fruit des premiers vers.
De là sont nés ces bruits reçus dans l'univers,
Qu'aux accents dont Orphée emplit les monts de Thrace
Les tigres amollis dépouillaient leur audace ;
Qu'aux accords d'Amphion les pierres se mouvaient,
Et sur les murs thébains en ordre s'élevaient.
L'harmonie en naissant produisit ces miracles.
Depuis, le ciel en vers fit parler les oracles ;
Du sein d'un prêtre, ému d'une divine horreur,
Apollon par des vers exhala sa fureur.
Bientôt, ressuscitant les héros des vieux âges,
Homère aux grands exploits anima les courages.
Hésiode à son tour, par d'utiles leçons,
Des champs trop paresseux vint hâter les moissons.
En mille écrits fameux la sagesse tracée

Fut, à l'aide des vers, aux mortels annoncée;
Et partout des esprits ses préceptes vainqueurs,
Introduits par l'oreille, entrèrent dans les cœurs.
Pour tant d'heureux bienfaits les muses révérées
Furent d'un juste encens dans la Grèce honorées;
Et leur art, attirant le culte des mortels,
A sa gloire en cent lieux vit dresser des autels.
Mais enfin, l'indigence amenant la bassesse,
Le Parnasse oublia sa première noblesse:
Un vil amour du gain, infectant les esprits,
De mensonges grossiers souilla tous les écrits,
Et partout, enfantant mille ouvrages frivoles,
Trafiqua du discours et vendit les paroles.
  Ne vous flétrissez point par un vice si bas.
Si l'or seul a pour vous d'invincibles appas,
Fuyez ces lieux charmants qu'arrose le Permesse:
Ce n'est point sur ses bords qu'habite la richesse.
Aux plus savants auteurs, comme aux plus grands guerriers,
Apollon ne promet qu'un nom et des lauriers.
  Mais quoi! dans la disette une muse affamée
Ne peut pas, dira-t-on, subsister de fumée;
Un auteur qui, pressé d'un besoin importun,
Le soir entend crier ses entrailles à jeun,
Goûte peu d'Hélicon les douces promenades:
Horace a bu son soûl quand il voit les Ménades,
Et, libre du souci qui trouble Colletet,
N'attend pas pour dîner le succès d'un sonnet.
  Il est vrai: mais enfin cette affreuse disgrâce
Rarement parmi nous afflige le Parnasse.
Et que craindre en ce siècle, où toujours les beaux-arts
D'un astre favorable éprouvent les regards,
Où d'un prince éclairé la sage prévoyance
Fait partout au mérite ignorer l'indigence?

Muses, dictez sa gloire à tous vos nourrissons :
Son nom vaut mieux pour eux que toutes vos leçons.
Que Corneille, pour lui rallumant son audace,
Soit encor le Corneille et du *Cid* et d'*Horace* ;
Que Racine, enfantant des miracles nouveaux,
De ses héros sur lui forme tous les tableaux ;
Que de son nom, chanté par la bouche des belles,
Benserade en tous lieux amuse les ruelles ;
Que Segrais dans l'églogue en charme les forêts ;
Que pour lui l'épigramme aiguise tous ses traits.
Mais quel heureux auteur, dans une autre *Énéide*,
Aux bords du Rhin tremblant conduira cet Alcide ?
Quelle savante lyre au bruit de ses exploits
Fera marcher encor les rochers et les bois ;
Chantera le Batave, éperdu dans l'orage,
Soi-même se noyant pour sortir du naufrage ;
Dira les bataillons sous Mastricht enterrés,
Dans ces affreux assauts du soleil éclairés ?
Mais tandis que je parle, une gloire nouvelle
Vers ce vainqueur rapide aux Alpes vous appelle.
Déjà Dôle et Salins sous le joug ont ployé ;
Besançon fume encor sous son roc foudroyé.
Où sont ces grands guerriers dont les fatales ligues
Devaient à ce torrent opposer tant de digues ?
Est-ce encore en fuyant qu'ils pensent l'arrêter,
Fiers du honteux honneur d'avoir su l'éviter ?
Que de remparts détruits ! Que de villes forcées !
Que de moissons de gloire en courant amassées !
Auteurs, pour les chanter redoublez vos transports :
Le sujet ne veut pas de vulgaires efforts.
Pour moi, qui, jusqu'ici nourri dans la satire,
N'ose encor manier la trompette et la lyre,
Vous me verrez pourtant, dans ce champ glorieux,

Vous animer du moins de la voix et des yeux ;
Vous offrir ces leçons que ma muse au Parnasse
Rapporta jeune encor du commerce d'Horace ;
Seconder votre ardeur, échauffer vos esprits,
Et vous montrer de loin la couronne et le prix.
Mais aussi pardonnez si, plein de ce beau zèle,
De tous vos pas fameux observateur fidèle,
Quelquefois du bon or je sépare le faux,
Et des auteurs grossiers j'attaque les défauts :
Censeur un peu fâcheux, mais souvent nécessaire,
Plus enclin à blâmer que savant à bien faire.

NOTES.

CANTO I.

[The first canto contains general precepts on the art of poetry, with a short digression on the history of French versification.]

1—6. Boileau begins his *Art poétique* by discussing, after the example of Horace, the relative importance of art and genius in poetry. Horace had said:

> Natura fieret laudabile carmen an arte
> Quaesitum est: ego nec studium sine divite vena
> Nec rude quid prosit video ingenium; alterius sic
> Alter poscit opem res et coniurat amice.
>
> (*Ars Poetica*, 408—411.)

Though Boileau does not give a definite decision, it is to be noted that he—the lawgiver of the correct school of poetry and the sworn enemy of bad verse—lays stress on genius as the one essential without which all is in vain.

6. **Pour lui Phébus est sourd, et Pégase est rétif**, suggested probably by Horace's "Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva" (*Ars Poetica*, 385).

8. **Bel esprit** is here practically equivalent to "poetry," though now its only meaning is "wit." It is interesting to note that a similar change of sense has taken place in our word "wit." (See Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, edited by West, pp. 48—51.) In *Épître* XI. Boileau has the phrase "Tout à coup devenu poète et bel esprit."

12. **Consultez longtemps votre esprit et vos forces.** Another echo of Horace:

> Sumite materiam vestris, qui scribitis, aequam
> Viribus, et versate diu quid ferre recusent,
> Quid valeant humeri. (*Ars Poetica*, 38—40.)

17. **François de Malherbe** (born at Caen 1555, died at Paris 1628) is the chief French poet of the earlier half of the seventeenth

century. He wrote very little, and all that is really good could be read, as Sainte-Beuve said, in half-an-hour; but he had a wonderful influence. It was Ronsard and the poets of the Pléiade who first led French poetry to the imitation of classical models; but it was Malherbe who was the first to urge and exemplify, if not enunciate, the doctrines of French classicism. See notes on ll. 123 and 131. He showed that he could "extol the deeds of a hero" in his odes to Henry IV, for example.

18. **Honorat de Beuil, Marquis de Racan** (1589—1670), the friend and disciple of Malherbe, and his biographer, was the author of a dramatic pastoral, *Les Bergeries* (1625), and a considerable number of short poems.

As Malherbe and Racan were of the same school, Boileau often speaks of them together (e.g. *Satire* IX. l. 175). In a letter dated 29th April 1695, he gives a valuable criticism of their work: "Malherbe... croît de réputation à mesure qu'il s'éloigne de son siècle. La vérité est pourtant...que la nature ne l'avait pas fait grand poète; mais il corrige ce défaut par son esprit et par son travail: car personne n'a plus travaillé ses ouvrages que lui, comme il paraît assez par le petit nombre de pièces qu'il a faites. Notre langue veut être extrêmement travaillée. Racan avait plus de génie que lui; mais il est plus négligé, et songe trop à le copier. Il excelle surtout, à mon avis, à dire les petites choses." Modern criticism entirely endorses this judgment. Yet Boileau had said "Racan pourrait chanter au défaut d'un Homère" (*Satire* IX. l. 44).

21. **Ainsi tel** refers to Marc-Antoine de Gérard, Sieur de Saint-Amant (1594-5—1661). His chief poems are an ode entitled *La Solitude*, *Albion*, written in violent hatred of the English, and of little poetical though considerable historical value, *Rome ridicule* (1643), and *Moïse sauvé* (1653), an "idylle héroïque" which celebrates the passage of the Red Sea. It is to the last poem that Boileau refers here, as also in Chant III. ll. 261—266. In *Satire* I. he had, with little reason, satirised Saint-Amant's poverty.

Nicolas Faret (1600—1646), "auteur du livre intitulé *L'Honnête Homme* [*ou l'art de plaire à la cour*, 1633] et ami de Saint-Amant," as Boileau tells us in a note, was, like Saint-Amant, one of the original members of the French Academy. Boileau was not the first to rhyme his name with "cabaret": Saint-Amant himself had done so several times already. But Faret was far from deserving the reputation he has thus acquired.

27. **Plaisant**, "amusing," not "pleasant," the comic and the sublime being contrasted. Contrast III. 289.

32. **L'esprit à la trouver aisément s'habitue.** Is "aisément" to be taken with "trouver" or "s'habitue"? To judge from the rhythm of the line, Boileau probably meant it to go with "s'habitue"; but it gives equally good sense with "trouver."

38. An interesting parallel to this admirable passage on rhyme and reason will be found towards the close of Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (published 1668): "The labour of rhyme bounds and circumscribes an over-fruitful fancy, the sense there being commonly confined to the couplet, and the words so ordered that the rhyme naturally follows them, not they the rhyme....Judgment is indeed the master-workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance. And verse I affirm to be one of these; 'tis a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely....Rhyme is an aid only to a luxuriant fancy."

40. **Droit sens**, a variation of the more common "bon sens."

41, 42. **Ils croiraient s'abaisser...S'ils pensaient ce qu'un autre a pu penser comme eux.** In his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* Boileau (VII) condemned the prose of Balzac (1594—1654) for this same fault: "On ne peut plus lui pardonner ce soin vicieux qu'il a de dire toutes choses autrement que ne le disent les autres hommes: de sorte que tous les jours on rétorque contre lui ce même vers que Maynard (*see note on* II. 97) a fait autrefois à sa louange,

Il n'est point de mortel qui parle comme lui."

Boileau gives an interesting and valuable definition of a "new thought" in the preface to the 1701 edition of his works: "Qu'est-ce qu'une pensée neuve, brillante, extraordinaire? Ce n'est point, comme se le persuadent les ignorants, une pensée que personne n'a jamais eue ni dû avoir; c'est au contraire une pensée qui a dû venir à tout le monde et que quelqu'un s'avise le premier d'exprimer. Un bon mot n'est bon mot qu'en ce qu'il dit une chose que chacun pensait, et qu'il la dit d'une manière vive, fine, et nouvelle." Boileau's views are summed up in Pope's famous couplet,

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.

(*Essay on Criticism*, 297, 298.)

43. **Italie.** The regencies of Catherine and Marie de Médicis, the respective wives of Henry II and Henry IV, had a great influence on French literature: but, as it is generally easier to imitate a fault than an excellence, French writers tended to follow the Italians only in their

"faux brillants" and "pointes" or conceits (see II. 105, 106). These could not but jar rudely on Boileau's stern "bon sens." Perhaps Boileau had Tasso specially in view here: in *Satire* IX. he had condemned his "clinquant" or "tinsel." See note on III. 210.

49, 50. This couplet has often, and justly, been criticised for its *quelquefois* and *jamais*, and its *objet* and *sujet.*

51—58. This passage satirises the description of an enchanted palace in the third book of the *Alaric, ou Rome vaincue* (1654) of Georges de Scudéry (see note on ll. 163, 164). In over four hundred lines, Scudéry carefully describes every part of the palace, from the "superbe façade" to the garden, and Boileau's "vingt feuillets" is almost literally correct. Line 56 is a direct parody of Scudéry's line:

> Ce ne sont que festons, ce ne sont que couronnes
> (p. 103, edition of 1654);

and line 54 appears to have been suggested by the following:

> Car une galerie, et haute et spacieuse,
> A balustres dorés règne tout à l'entour. (p. 104.)

56. **Astragales,** "astragals," the moulding at the top or bottom of the shaft of a column.

59. **L'abondance stérile &c.** The necessity of restraint and temperance is really the cardinal point in the doctrine of classicism in literature, which may be said to aim at the perception of beauty under the aspect of form. It forbids all useless details, as they can only weaken the general effect; and it condemns a mass of descriptions where none are of outstanding importance, as they cannot convey an ordered idea to the mind of the reader and are hence only an "abondance stérile." Boileau's splendid line "Qui ne sait se borner ne sut jamais écrire," sums up the spirit of classicism in literature.

62. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 337:

> Omne supervacuum pleno de pectore manat.

64. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 31:

> In vitium ducit culpae fuga si caret arte.

65—68. A direct imitation of Horace:

> Brevis esse laboro,
> Obscurus fio; sectantem levia nervi
> Deficiunt animique; professus grandia turget;
> Serpit humi tutus nimium timidusque procellae.
> (*Ars Poetica*, 25—28.)
> Aut dum vitat humum nubes et inania captet.
> (*Ib.* 230.)

75—78. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 343:

Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo.
Hic meret aera liber Sosiis.

Sir William Soame gives a good rendering of these lines in his translation of Boileau's *Art of Poetry* (published 1683):

Happy who in his verse can gently steer
From grave to light, from pleasant to severe.

Cf. Pope, *Essay on Man*, IV. 379, 380:

...happily to steer
From grave to gay, from lively to severe.

Claude Barbin was one of the leading booksellers of the time, and one of Boileau's publishers. His shop was at the Palais-de-Justice, "sur le second perron de la Sainte-Chapelle." Cf. *Épître* X. 5, 6:

Et déjà chez Barbin, ambitieux libelles,
Vous brûlez d'étaler vos feuilles criminelles.

81. **Burlesque**. The burlesque style was very much in vogue about 1650. Its chief exponents were Paul Scarron (see note on l. 94), d'Assoucy (see l. 90), Saint-Amant (see l. 21), and Cyrano de Bergerac (see IV. 39). By the time of the death of Scarron in 1660 it was already dying a natural death. It arose in great part as a reaction against the strict correctness of Malherbe, though in nature it is closely connected with preciosity. In the 1674 preface to his own burlesque *Le Lutrin*, Boileau was careful to distinguish it from those which he here condemns: "C'est un burlesque nouveau dont je me suis avisé dans notre langue: car, au lieu que dans l'autre burlesque Didon et Énée parlaient comme des harengères et des crocheteurs, dans celui-ci une horlogère et un horloger parlent comme Didon et Énée."

This line was originally "Sous l'appui de Scarron, le burlesque effronté"; but Boileau altered it out of consideration for Scarron's widow, the Marquise de Maintenon.

84. **Le langage des halles**, the language of the markets, i.e. our "Billingsgate."

85. So great was "the licence of rhyming" that there appeared a *Passion de Notre-Seigneur en vers burlesques*, and an *Extase de la France mourant d'amour devant Jésus-Christ crucifié, en vers burlesques.*

86. **Apollon travesti**. Plainly an allusion to Scarron's *Virgile travesti* (1648). See note on l. 94.

Tabarin—the valet of a quack named Mondor, who had his stand near the Pont-Neuf and established a "theatre" there (cf. l. 97 and see

note on III. 427)—is the typical merry-andrew of French literature. He began to act about 1618. His farces were exceedingly popular, but they were of a very gross nature. They were first printed at Paris in 1622.

88. **Clerc** has here the meaning of "office-clerk," and not of "scholar" or "clergyman."

90. **Charles Coypeau d'Assoucy** (1604—1678) was the author of *Ovide en belle humeur* (1653), a burlesque imitation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Boileau tells us that he had this work in view here.

D'Assoucy replied to Boileau at length in his *Aventures de Monsieur d'Assoucy* (1677): "Si l'on me demande," he says, "pourquoi ce burlesque,...après avoir si longtemps diverti la France, a cessé de divertir notre cour, c'est que Scarron a cessé de vivre, et que j'ai cessé d'écrire. Et si je voulais continuer mon *Ovide en belle humeur*, cette même cour... s'en divertirait comme auparavant......Je me vois déchu de tous mes honneurs, et que ce Charles d'Assoucy, d'Empereur du Burlesque qu'il était, premier de ce nom, n'est aujourd'hui, si on veut le (*i.e. Boileau*) croire, que le dernier reptile du Parnasse et le marmiton des Muses." (Chap. XI. pp. 290, 1, edition of 1858.)

94. **Typhon.** Besides travestying Virgil, Paul Scarron (1610—1660) wrote a burlesque description of the war of the giants and gods, entitled *Typhon, ou la Gigantomachie* (1644). "Scarron est l'original de cette plaisante façon d'écrire," says d'Assoucy. *Virgile travesti* is the best of the seventeenth century burlesques, but Scarron's best work is his *Roman comique* (1651).

96. **Clément Marot** (1495—1544) is the chief French poet of the earlier half of the sixteenth century. His work may be roughly divided into two classes, the one containing his "Chants royaux," "Ballades," "Rondeaux," "Épîtres," "Épigrammes," "Élégies," "Blasons," "Complaintes," etc. and the other consisting of longer and more serious poems such as his "Allégories," his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and above all his translation of the *Cinquante Psaumes de David*. His "élégant badinage" is to be seen in the former class, which contains his best work.

97. **Pont-Neuf.** See note on l. 86 and on III. 427.

98. **N'allez point aussi.** The correct form now is "n'allez point non plus," or, if *aussi* is to be preserved, "mais aussi n'allez pas."

Guillaume de Brébeuf (1618—1661) had published a translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* in 1653. Boileau refers to the following lines which occur in the seventh book:

Il voit de toutes parts
Des spectacles sanglants effrayer ses regards;
De mourants et de morts cent montagnes plaintives,
D'un sang impétueux cent vagues fugitives,
Cent horreurs que du choc avait caché l'horreur,
S'étalent à ses yeux et déchirent son cœur.
(p. 263, edition of 1659).

This is Brébeuf's translation of

Cernit propulsa cruore
Flumina, et excelsos cumulis aequantia colles
Corpore. (VII. 789—791.)

In a letter dated 9th October 1708, Boileau says Brébeuf's *Pharsale* contains more bombast than any other book he knows; and in the *Lutrin*, Chant V. 162, he speaks of it disparagingly as "la *Pharsale* aux provinces si chère." In one of his *Epigrams*, however, he admits that

Malgré son fatras obscur
Souvent Brébeuf étincelle.

101. Note that Boileau says "soyez simple *avec* art."

102. **Sans fard**. In a contemporary volume of satires entitled *Le Poète sans fard* (1697)—a title apparently suggested by this line—Boileau is taken as the "modèle du poète sans fard."

103. As the context shows, this line refers only to the *art* of the poem, and not to its meaning.

105—8. These lines give an admirable example of the precept they contain: the vowels do not "hustle" one another, and the sense cuts the line into two equal parts. But a succession of such lines would be as intolerably monotonous as those of the "psalm-singing" authors referred to in l. 74, and an earlier precept must be borne in mind,—"Sans cesse en écrivant variez vos discours." The normal line, however, has the caesura or pause after the third foot.

111, 112. Boileau again insists on the extreme importance of art. These lines bring out the full meaning of l. 103.

113 &c. It must be carefully borne in mind that in the following passage Boileau gives the history not so much of French poetry as of French versification.

113, 114. **Français** and **lois** no longer rhyme; but in the time of Boileau *français* (which was written *françois*) was pronounced *françoué*, and *lois* was pronounced *loué*.

115, 116. There were no *rigid* rules in old French verse as to the

number of syllables or the caesura, but otherwise Boileau's statement is absurd. He gave a similarly inaccurate note to l. 118: "La plupart de nos plus anciens romans français sont en vers confus et sans ordre, comme le *Roman de la Rose* et plusieurs autres." It was Ronsard who laid down the principles of the classical alexandrine,—a fact which Boileau forgets in his ensuing attack.

117. **François Villon** (1431—1485?) marks the beginning of the modern spirit in poetry. Boileau's implication, however, that he made radical changes in French versification is absolutely erroneous, for in his metrical forms he is purely medieval. His individuality, as opposed to the traditional mannerisms of medieval literature, constitute his claim to be the first modern poet in France. His authenticated work consists of the *Petit Testament*, the *Grand Testament*, and a few *Ballades*.

119. **Marot**. See note on l. 96. It is to be noted that Marot never wrote either *triolets* or *mascarades*, that he made no change in the *rondeau*, and that his only innovation in metre (l. 122) was the elision of the *e* mute at the end of the first hemistich. (See Morillot's *Boileau*, p. 68.) A *triolet* consists of eight lines with two rhymes, the first line being repeated as the fourth and seventh and the second as the eighth. A *mascarade* is not a fixed verse form, being merely verses spoken or sung by "masqueraders." For *ballade* and *rondeau* see notes on II. 140, 141.

123. **Pierre de Ronsard** (born at La Poissonnière 1524, died at Paris 1585) is the real founder of the classical school of poetry, for he was the first to insist on the imitation of the poets of Greece and Rome. His reforms in the more formal part of poetry were threefold: (1) in the matter of *metre*, he restored the alexandrine and "created almost all the rhythms which have been used since, and some still unused"; (2) in the matter of *verse-form*, he discarded the rondeau, the ballade, the chanson &c. for the ode in the manner of Pindar or Horace, the satire, the epic &c.; (3) in the matter of *language* he introduced some new words, modelled on the Greek or Latin, but their number is often exaggerated. Unfortunately his zeal for the ancients was excessive and sometimes even blind and unreasoning. It was left to Malherbe to revise Ronsard's doctrines, to confine them within a narrower channel, and thus to strengthen them. Boileau did not know that, in being the direct descendant of Malherbe, he was also the direct descendant of Ronsard.

125. **Longtemps eut un heureux destin**. Ronsard's reputation died down after 1630 with the rise of Malherbe's. Henceforward he

was ignored or despised till Sainte-Beuve "rediscovered" him in his *Tableau de la poésie française au xvie siècle* (1828).

126. **En français parlant grec et latin.** This criticism is unjust. Ronsard had said, indeed, at the beginning of *Le Tombeau de Marguerite de France et de François Ier*:

> Ah! que je suis marry que la muse françoise
> Ne peut dire ces mots comme fait la grégeoise:
> "Ocymore, dyspotme, oligochronien!"
> Certes, je les dirois du sang valésien.

But these must on no account be taken as typical verses. And though his early *Abrégé de l'Art poétique français* (1565) contains the precept,—"tu composeras hardiment des mots à l'imitation des Grecs et Latins," we get a truer idea of his position by a statement in the second preface (1584) to his *Franciade*: "Je supplie très humblement ceux auxquels les Muses ont inspiré leur faveur, de n'être plus latineurs ni grecaniseurs."

130. **Philippe Desportes** (1546—1606) was one of the last of the Pléiade or the school of Ronsard. As he and Bertaut both wrote while Ronsard's reputation was still at its height Boileau's *retenus* is historically inaccurate. In most of his work he is a love poet, a courtier poet, or an imitator of the Italians; but his last work was a complete translation of the Psalms. He was severely criticised by Malherbe in the *Commentaire sur Desportes* (first published in 1825). Mathurin Régnier, the satirist, was his nephew.

Jean Bertaut (1552—1611), bishop of Séez, was a disciple of Ronsard and Desportes. His poems deal for the most part with grave and pious subjects, and abound in moralisings.

An interesting companion passage to ll. 123—130 occurs in the *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* (VII.). "Il n'y a en effet que l'approbation de la postérité qui puisse établir le vrai mérite des ouvrages. Quelque éclat qu'ait fait un écrivain durant sa vie, quelques éloges qu'il ait reçus, on ne peut pas pour cela infailliblement conclure que ses ouvrages soient excellents. De faux brillants, la nouveauté du style, un tour d'esprit qui était à la mode, peuvent les avoir fait valoir; et il arrivera peut-être que dans le siècle suivant on ouvrira les yeux, et que l'on méprisera ce que l'on a admiré. Nous en avons un bel exemple dans Ronsard et dans ses imitateurs, comme du Bellay, du Bartas, Desportes, qui, dans le siècle précédent, ont été l'admiration de tout le monde, et qui aujourd'hui ne trouvent pas même de lecteurs."

131. **Malherbe.** See notes on ll. 17 and 123. Malherbe did not

invent any new forms of versification; on the other hand he cultivated only a few of those already existing. But all he wrote, he wrote with the greatest care. He demanded a full and perfect rhythm and never permitted his verse to break the *règles du devoir*. "He proscribed all licence and feebleness, cacophony, inversion, hiatus, overflow, and absence of caesura." He was thus the first to add what our eighteenth century poets were to call "correctness" to the classical doctrines of Ronsard. Like Boileau, he polished and repolished his verses; he said that "après avoir fait un poème de cent vers ou un discours de trois feuilles, il fallait se reposer dix ans tout entiers." His reform in the language (ll. 135, 136) was similar. He *selected* from the vocabulary of Ronsard, and rejected many of his words as affected and cacophonous. His extreme scrupulousness in this respect won him the title of "le tyran des mots et des syllabes."

132, 133. It is interesting to note that Boileau makes a very similar remark about Balzac, whom critics now recognise as the Malherbe of prose. "On peut dire que jamais personne n'a mieux su sa langue que lui, et n'a mieux entendu la propriété des mots et la juste mesure des périodes" (*Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, VII.).

138. **Enjamber**, "to overflow," literally "to stride." There is said to be an *enjambement* when the sense is not completed at the end of one verse or couplet, and is, as Milton said, "variously drawn out from one verse into another." *Enjambement* is now often translated "overflow." (See Mr Gosse's *From Shakespeare to Pope*, p. 6.) By prohibiting the overflow, the classicists, both in England and France, deprived themselves of a great source of poetical beauty. Perhaps no one has used it with greater effect than Keats.

142. **Tour**, the expression, form, or *turn* of a phrase, sentence, or verse. Cf. I. 158 and II. 143.

144. **Se détendre**, "to relax," i.e. the attention begins to wander.

148. **Nuage épais**. This recalls the thick mists and fogs which enshroud the Goddess of Dulness in Pope's *Dunciad*.

151—4. Cf. Horace:

Cui lecta potenter erit res,
Nec facundia deseret hunc nec lucidus ordo.
(*Ars Poetica*, 40, 41.)

and Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons:
Rem tibi Socraticae poterunt ostendere chartae,
Verbaque provisam rem non invita sequentur.
(*Ib.* 309—311.)

Cf. also Cicero: "Dicere recte nemo potest nisi qui prudenter intelligit." (*Brutus*, vi. 23.)

This is the doctrine of Buffon's famous *Discours sur le Style* (1753). Cf. also George Herbert: "Who cannot dress it well, want wit not words," and Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*, CXXIV.

159. **Barbarisme**, "barbarism," a fault in language, accidence, &c. as "vous disez" for "vous dites" &c.: **solécisme**, "solecism," a fault in syntax. There was, however, considerable uncertainty as to the precise meaning of the words in the 17th century, as is shown by the following quotation from the Port-Royal *Art of Speaking* (English translation, 1676, p. 65): "The grammarians do not agree about the definition... Monsieur de Vaugelas applies *barbarism* only to words, phrases, or particles; and *solecism* to declensions, conjugations, and construction."

160. **Ampoulé**, "bombastic." Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, l. 97, "ampullas et sesquipedalia verba." *Ampoulé* and *ampoule* bear the same relation to each other as the L. *ampullatus* and *ampulla*, whence they are derived.

163, 164. Boileau tells us that these lines had special reference to *Georges de Scudéry* (see notes on ll. 51—58 and III. 272) who used to excuse himself for writing so quickly by saying he had orders to finish. Boileau had already attacked Scudéry in *Satire* II. for his hasty work:

Bienheureux Scudéri, dont la fertile plume
Peut tous les mois sans peine enfanter un volume!
Tes écrits, il est vrai, sans art et languissants,
Semblent être formés en dépit du bon sens,
Mais ils trouvent pourtant, quoi qu'on en puisse dire,
Un marchand pour les vendre et des sots pour les lire;
Et quand la rime enfin se trouve au bout des vers,
Qu'importe que le reste y soit mis de travers?

171. **Hâtez-vous lentement**, a happy translation, now proverbial, of the Greek σπεῦδε βραδέως and the Latin *festina lente*. Cf. La Fontaine, *Fables* VI. 10, "Elle se hâte avec lenteur."

172—4. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 292—4:

Carmen reprehendite quod non
Multa dies et multa litura coercuit, atque
Perfectum decies non castigavit ad unguem.

No poet ever followed this precept better than Boileau himself. Cf. the confession of *Satire* II. 47—52:

Mais mon esprit, tremblant sur le choix de ses mots,
N'en dira jamais un, s'il ne tombe à propos,
Et ne saurait souffrir qu'une phrase insipide
Vienne à la fin d'un vers remplir la place vide;
Ainsi, recommençant un ouvrage vingt fois,
Si j'écris quatre mots, j'en effacerai trois.

175, 176. Note the unfortunate mixture of metaphors in this couplet.

178. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, l. 152:

Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.

180. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, l. 23:

Denique sit quidvis simplex dumtaxat et unum.

Pope expresses the same idea in his *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 249—252:

No single parts unequally surprise,
All comes united to th' admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The Whole at once is bold and regular.

This was a necessary precept for the poets of the classical school, who were essentially unoriginal and aimed rather at the perfect expression and arrangement of common ideas. There are perhaps no better examples to be found of Boileau's "un seul tout de diverses parties" than some of Pope's masterly "mosaics."

181, 182. The poet must not go out of his way in search of effect.

186 &c. Cf. IV. ll. 59 and 71. In his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, Boileau remarks that "nous ne saurions trop consulter nos amis." A poet of the romantic school could hardly subscribe to this statement; but a true classicist really must, if he expresses only the common ideas of mankind and excels by the *form* in which he expresses them.

189. **Dépouillez l'arrogance.** The more regular construction would be *se dépouiller de l'arrogance.*

190. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 424, 5.

193. **Aussitôt**, from the very first verse.

193—197. Imitated from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 429—433.

Se récrier, "to express loud admiration."

194. **Le fait extasier**, i.e. "fait qu'il s'extasie": "extasier" is now used only reflexively.

199—207. Imitated, likewise, from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 445—449.

202. **Il renvoie en leur lieu les vers mal arrangés**, an example carefully followed by Boileau in the present poem. See notes on III. 159, 160, and IV. 59. This line throws an interesting light on the

artificiality and "mosaic" nature of much of the poetry of the classical school.

205. **Votre construction semble s'obscurcir.** Cf. ll. 141—146. The meaning should, to use a modern idiom, *sauter aux yeux.*

208. **Sur ses vers un auteur intraitable**, i.e. "un auteur intraitable quand il s'agit de ses vers."

223. **Aussitôt**, as soon as he has recited his verses.

224. **Fat** in the time of Boileau was equivalent to *sot*, as is clearly shown by this line and its context, and by Chant IV. l. 50 "un fat quelquefois ouvre un avis important." *Fat* has now the meaning of "fop." In Cotgrave's *French-English Dictionary* (1611), which is invaluable for the sixteenth and seventeenth century meaning of French words, *fat* is defined as "a sot, an ideot, a ninnie, a noddie, an asse, a gull."

Abuse, "imposes on."

227. **Fournit** would now need to be in the plural: but the singular was often used in the seventeenth century in such cases as this.

229. **Les courtisans.** As in the case of the burlesque, for example; see the quotation from d'Assoucy in note to l. 90. Cf. also II. 130.

CANTO II.

[The second canto deals with the special laws of the shorter poems,—the Idyll, the Elegy, the Ode, the Sonnet, the Epigram, the Rondeau, the Ballade, the Madrigal, the Satire, and the Vaudeville.

It will be noted that Boileau does not include the Fable, though it was his friend La Fontaine who brought it to perfection, and though he himself was the author of two,—*L'Huître et les Plaideurs* (*Épître* II.) and *Le Bûcheron et la Mort.* The following are the chief reasons which have been urged for the omission.

1. He did not intend to give a complete list of the poetical forms. If he omitted the Fable, he omitted also the Epistle and Didactic Poetry, under which two heads most of his own work would be included.

2. He omitted the Fable if not involuntarily, at least through negligence, or by a mechanical imitation of the other arts of poetry: Horace had not mentioned the Fable in spite of Æsop, nor Didactic Poetry in spite of Virgil.

3. When he wrote his *Art poétique*, the Fable was represented

in France only by the first six books of La Fontaine's *Fables* (1668) and in them La Fontaine had not attained the perfection of his art.

4. He omitted the Fable through fear of offending Louis XIV, who did not view La Fontaine at all favourably.

As is evident, however, there is much to be said against every one of these explanations. What is after all the best explanation, though it is not always advanced, was given by Louis Racine, the son of the great dramatist, in his *Réflexions sur la Poésie:*

5. "On est surpris que Boileau ne l'ait jamais nommé; il m'en a dit la raison; il ne regardait pas La Fontaine comme original, parce que, me dit-il, il n'était créateur, ni de ses sujets, ni de son style, qu'il avait pris dans Marot et dans Rabelais. 'C'est pourquoi, m'ajouta-t-il, quand j'ai parlé du style naïf, j'ai nommé Marot:

Imitez de Marot l'élégant badinage.

La Fontaine s'en avouait le disciple'."

But even this does not justify so serious an omission. Voltaire finds an excuse for Boileau in La Fontaine's "grand nombre de fautes contre la langue et contre la correction du style" (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. "Fable").]

1—37. *The Idyll.*

6. **Éclater**, "to shine," here means little more than "se manifester," as is shown by the phrases *sans pompe* and *humble dans son style.* The use of *éclater* in this weak (though common) sense is unfortunate after the *éclat* of l. 3; cf. also the repetition of *plus beau* in ll. 1 and 4.

14. **Au milieu d'une églogue entonne la trompette.** It must be carefully borne in mind that Boileau's general satire had usually a particular application. Here reference is made to an eclogue by Gilles Ménage (1613—1692), entitled *Christine* (1654), in which a shepherd extols the merits of Queen Christina of Sweden and recounts the doings and prospects of the Swedish arms:

Par les vaillantes mains de ses braves guerriers
Cette jeune amazone a cueilli de lauriers.
Un jour, qui n'est pas loin, ses superbes armées
Joindront à ces lauriers les palmes idumées,
Et l'on verra pâlir l'infidèle croissant
A l'aspect lumineux de cet astre naissant...

(p. 6, edition of 1654.)

Boileau had already satirised these lines in *Satire* IX. 256, and other lines in the same poem in *Satire* II. 37—42. The true nature of Boileau's *Art poétique* has been admirably expressed by M. Émile Faguet: "L'*Art*

poëtique est à la fois une dernière œuvre de polémique et un code littéraire. C'est la dernière des satires, et ce sont les tables de la loi."

Entonner la trompette is a metonymy for "to write epic poetry."

20. **Rampent.** Cf. I. 68 and III. 190. The whole line is an echo of Horace's "serpit humi" (*Ars Poetica*, 28).

21. **Ronsard.** See note on I. 123.

22. **Gothiques** was the worst term of reproach which could be applied to any work of art during the reign of classicism: it was synonymous with "barbarous." Cf. Pope's *Dunciad* I. 145 &c.

A Gothic library! of Greece and Rome
Well purg'd......
But, high above, more solid learning shone,
The Classics of an Age that heard of none;
There Caxton slept &c.

In France, Chateaubriand was the first to help to remove this stigma from the Middle Ages (see note on III. 81); in England, this honour is Horace Walpole's.

23. **De l'oreille et du son**, a pleonasm.

24. Ronsard, and Marot too, had substituted such names as Michau, Margot, and Robin for such recognised pastoral names as Thyrsis, Lycidas, and Philis. In his first eclogue, Ronsard gives Henry II, Charles IX, and Catherine de Médicis the respective names of Henriot, Carlin, and Catin, and in another Ronsard himself and Du Bellay appear as Perrot (not Pierrot) and Bellot.

28. Taken from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 268, 269:

Vos exemplaria Graeca
Nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.

30. **Descendre.** Boileau might possibly have proscribed or omitted the pastoral but for the example of Theocritus and Virgil.

32. **Au combat de la flûte animer deux bergers.** Probably a recollection of Virgil's third eclogue.

34. The story of Narcissus being turned into a flower is told in the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: that of Daphne being turned into a laurel in the first book.

36. **Rend dignes d'un consul la campagne et les bois.** A reference to Virgil's *Eclogues*, IV. 3:

Si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae.

38—57. *The Elegy.*

38—44. In this description of the elegy, it may well be asked what connection have ll. 41, 42 with l. 39. Though modelled on Horace's *Ars*

Poetica 75, 76, Boileau's description is not happy. It is vastly inferior to that which André Chénier was to give incidentally in *Élégie* 30:

Mais la tendre élégie et sa grace touchante
M'ont séduit; l'élégie à la voix gémissante,
Aux ris mêlés de pleurs, aux long cheveux épars,
Belle, levant au ciel ses humides regards &c.

44. **C'est peu d'être poète, il faut être amoureux.** Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, whom Boileau was yet to attack (Chant III.), had satirised, in his comedy *Les Visionnaires* (1637), those poets who are only "amoureux en poète."

An interesting English parallel is Dr Johnson's criticism of Cowley's *Mistress* in the *Lives of the Poets.*

47. **Fous de sens rassis**, "raging in cold blood." *Être de sens rassis*, "to be cool-headed, unmoved, unexcited."

48. **Amoureux transis**, "whining lovers."

Transir is used of the effect produced by fear, and even by respect and admiration. Pascal has the following phrase "J'entre en une vénération qui me *transit de respect* envers ceux qu'il semble avoir choisis pour ses élus." (Letter to Mlle de Roannez, 3.)

51. As in the description of the eclogue Boileau could not steer clear of satire but attacked Ménage, so here he pokes fun at Vincent Voiture (1598—1648), though he had delicately praised him in *Satire* III. 181, and had coupled his name with Horace's in *Satire* IX. 27, and was again to praise him in his preface of 1701. In his famous *Sonnet d'Uranie* Voiture had said:

Je bénis mon martyre, et content de mourir
Je n'ose murmurer contre sa tyrannie.
Quelquefois *ma raison*, par de faibles discours,
M'incite à la révolte et me promet secours.
Mais lorsqu'à mon besoin je me veux servir d'elle,
Après beaucoup de peine et d'efforts impuissants,
Elle dit qu'Uranie est seule aimable et belle,
Et m'y rengage plus que ne font *tous mes sens.*

(*Œuvres*, Vol. II. p. 35, edition of 1678.)

It is to be noted that these lines occur in a sonnet, and not in an elegy. Voiture wrote only two elegies, one to Belise and the other to Philis, and it is quite possible that it was in the recollection of them that Boileau wrote ll. 41, 42: "Elle peint des amants la joie et la tristesse" &c.

Perhaps Boileau's satire was not directed only against Voiture, for

the line "font longtemps disputer sa raison et ses sens" occurs in Scudéry's description of the enchanted palace in the third book of his *Alaric*. See note on I. 51—58.

54. **Amour**, i.e. the God of Love.

Soupirer is usually intransitive, as in l. 116; it is used transitively only in poetry. Cf. Racine, *Esther* I. 1 "Toi qui...m'aidais à soupirer les malheurs de Sion." Tibullus, curiously enough, happens to use the phrase "suspirat amores" once or twice.

57. A repetition of the doctrine of l. 44.

58—81. *The Ode.*

58. **Et non moins d'énergie**, i.e. "et non moins d'énergie *que d'éclat*."

60. **Commerce avec les dieux**. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 83—85:

Musa dedit fidibus divos puerosque deorum
Et pugilem victorem et equum certamine primum......referre.

61. **Pise**, Pisa in Elis, where the Olympic games were held.

62. There is a distinct echo in ll. 60—62 of the beginning of Horace's first ode.

63. **Simoïs**, a river of Troas, mentioned in the *Iliad*.

64. **L'Escaut**, the Scheldt: an allusion to Louis XIV's great victories in Flanders in 1667. The sudden transition from Achilles to Louis XIV may now appear somewhat ludicrous, but the admiration of Louis XIV during his lifetime was as sincere as it was unbounded. Cf. III. 250 and IV. 187—222.

65. **Comme une abeille** &c. Cf. Horace, *Odes* IV. ii. 27—32, "Ego apis Matinae &c."

66. **Rivage**, literally "bank" or "shore," has here the extended meaning of "country." Cf. Racine, *Phèdre*, I. 3:

Voyage infortuné! Rivage malheureux,
Fallait-il approcher de tes bords dangereux?

68. **Iris**. Cf. *Satire* IX. 262: "Pour quelque Iris en l'air faire le langoureux."

69, 70. Suggested by Horace, *Odes* II. xii. 25—28, as Boileau tells us:

Dum flagrantia detorquet ad oscula
Cervicem, aut facili saevitia negat,
Quae poscente magis gaudeat eripi,
Interdum rapere occupet.

72. Cf. Cicero, *Orator ad M. Brutum*, 23, 78, "quaedam etiam negligentia est diligens," and Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 154, "brave disorder."

73. **Loin ces rimeurs craintifs**, i.e. "il faut repousser bien loin ces rimeurs craintifs," or something to that effect.

76. **Maigres historiens, suivront l'ordre des temps.** Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 146—149:

> Nec reditum Diomedis ab interitu Meleagri,
> Nec gemino bellum Troianum orditur ab ovo;
> Semper ad eventum festinat et in medias res
> Non secus ac notas auditorem rapit.

Cf. also Vida's *Poetics* II. 74—108 and Scaliger's *Poetics*, Idea, XCVI. Spenser makes a similar statement in the letter to Sir Walter Raleigh usually prefixed to the *Faerie Queene*: "An Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing of the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing analysis of all."

78. Further allusions to Louis XIV's campaigns. Lille and Courtrai were taken in 1667 and Dôle in 1668.

79. **François Eudes de Mézeray** (1610—1683) brought out in 1643, 1646, and 1651 the three huge folio volumes of his *Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu'à maintenant*. His candour in his *Abrégé chronologique de l'Histoire de France* (1668) brought him into disfavour and lost him part of his pension.

81. A variation on the metaphors of I. 6.

Boileau was too close a follower of Horace not to attempt an ode himself, but the *Ode sur la prise de Namur* (1693), on which he spared no pains (see his letters to Racine) and which he hoped to make a masterpiece, is interesting only as a monument of bad taste. His only other ode had been written in 1656. Boileau's *Discours sur l'Ode* (1693) supplements and expounds this passage.

82—102. *The Sonnet.*

83, 84. **Français, lois.** See note on I. ll. 113, 114.

85, 86. The octave of the sonnet, consisting of "two quatrains of equal measure," must have only two rhymes, the one connecting the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines, and the other the second, third, sixth, and seventh. (This is not the case, however, in the English Shakespearian sonnet.) The line of the French sonnet is, of course, hexameter.

87, 88. In the sestet, consisting of "two tercets, divided by the sense," there are three rhymes, but these are variously combined.

91. As well as allowing no licence in the rhyme, the sonnet must

have "no slovenliness of diction, no weak or indeterminate terminations, no vagueness of conception, and no obscurity."

92. No word that rhymes should be used in any other portion of the sonnet.

94. **Un sonnet sans défaut vaut seul un long poème.** An admirable line, summing up an excellent description, surprisingly excellent, indeed, if we consider that neither sonnets nor sonneteers were to Boileau's severe taste. The most famous French sonnets of the seventeenth century are Voiture's *Sonnet d'Uranie* (quoted in note to II. 51), Benserade's *Sonnet de Job* (see note to IV. 200), and Malleville's *La belle matineuse* (II. 97). Boileau wrote two sonnets, but in his early youth.

97. **Jean Ogier de Gombauld** (1570—1666) published a *Recueil de Sonnets* in 1649; but his *Recueil d'Épigrammes* (1657) is now usually considered his best work.

François de Maynard (1582—1646) was, like Racan (see I. 18), an immediate disciple of Malherbe (see I. 17, 131). Fortunately Malherbe's opinion on his disciple's work has been preserved for us in the *Historiettes* of Tallemant des Réaux: "Maynard était celui de tous ses élèves qui faisait le mieux des vers, mais il n'avait point de force, et il s'était adonné à un genre de poésie (l'épigramme) auquel il n'était pas propre, parce qu'il n'avait pas assez de pointe d'esprit."

Claude de Malleville (1597—1647) won most of his reputation by a single sonnet—*La belle matineuse.* His poems (which consist chiefly of "sonnets," "stances," "chansons," and "rondeaux") were published posthumously. Gombauld, Maynard, and Malleville were all original members of the French Academy.

99. **Pelletier** (d. 1680), an advocate by profession, was the author of several hundred sonnets. It is this reference, and others in the *Discours au Roi* ("parmi les Pelletiers on compte des Corneilles") and in *Satires* II. III. VII. and IX. which have preserved his memory.

100. **Charles de Sercy** was a bookseller at the Palais-de-Justice, "à la salle Dauphine." Cf. note to I. 78.

101. **La borne prescrite**, i.e. the fourteen lines.

103—138. *The Epigram.*

The juxtaposition of the sonnet and the epigram and the incidental comparison may now appear surprising; but Boileau was following a tradition. Most of the sixteenth century treatises on poetry (e.g. Sebilet's, 1549, Jacques Pelletier's, 1555, and Pierre de Laudun's, 1598) consider them analogous forms; and as late as 1658, Colletet, in his

Traité du Sonnet, before dealing with the history and characteristics of the sonnet, distinguished it from the ode and the epigram.

103. **Plus libre en son tour plus borné**: the epigram is shorter than the sonnet (though it has no fixed rules as to length) and is not subject to any "rigoureuses lois." Boileau happens to be the author of what is perhaps the shortest French epigram, viz.:

J'ai vu l'Agésilas (*Corneille's play*),
Hélas!

104. **Bon mot** in the time of Boileau did not mean a "joke," as it now does, but simply a "happy expression," a "good saying." Cf. III. 410.

105. **Pointes**, "conceits." See note on I. 43. Boileau here renews the attack on the "précieux" which he had begun in his Satires.

The tendency to conceits began in Italy in the *concetti* of Guarini and Marini. Thence it passed to Spain, where it appeared in the *estilo culto* of Gongora, and to France, where it was known as *préciosité*.

111. **Madrigal**. See ll. 143, 144.

113. Boileau tells us in a note that he was here alluding to *Sylvie* (1621), a pastoral drama by Jean de Mairet (1604—1686). But the satire has a wider application. In the preface to the 1701 edition of his works he criticises Théophile de Viaud for the same fault: "Je ne saurais rapporter un exemple qui le fasse mieux sentir que deux vers du poète Théophile, dans sa tragédie intitulée *Pyrame et Thisbé*, lorsque cette malheureuse amante ayant ramassé le poignard encore tout sanglant dont Pyrame s'était tué, elle querelle ainsi ce poignard:

Ah! voici le poignard qui du sang de son maître
S'est souillé lâchement. Il en rougit, le traître!"

The former half of this preface is an interesting supplement to the present passage.

119. **Deux visages divers**, i.e. two different meanings. An English parallel to this passage is to be found in Addison's remarks on "mixed wit," in the sixty-second number of the *Spectator*. "There is another kind of wit," says Addison, "which consists partly in the resemblance of ideas, and partly in the resemblance of words, which for distinction sake I shall call *mixed wit*......*Mixed wit* therefore is a composition of pun and true wit, and is more or less perfect as the resemblance lies in the ideas or in the words. Its foundations are laid partly in falsehood and partly in truth: reason puts in her claim for one half of it, and extravagance for the other. The only province therefore for this kind of wit is epigram, or those little occasional

poems that in their own nature are nothing else but a tissue of epigrams." Much of this, it will be noted, is developed from ll. 126—128.

121. **Le Palais**, i.e. le Palais-de-Justice.

122. Boileau tells us that he was referring in particular to "le petit Père André [Boulanger], augustin" (1582—1657); but once again the satire has a more general application. It applies to almost every preacher in the first half of the seventeenth century.

123. It was Boileau as much as anybody who showed that reason was "outraged" by these conceits; but Molière (cf. note on III. 182) and Racine also ridiculed them, and La Fontaine found occasion to say that

Dieu ne créa que pour les sots
Les méchants diseurs de bons mots.

130. **A la cour**, another satirical reference to the bad taste prevailing at the court. Cf. I. 229. The prudent Boileau would not have been so bold had Louis' taste been the same as that of his courtiers.

Turlupins, "makers of conundrums," "punsters." According to Voltaire, in his life of Molière, the word is derived from Turlupin, the name taken by Henri le Grand, an actor of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, when he played comic parts.

139—144. *The Rondeau, the Ballade, and the Madrigal.*

140. The *Rondeau* is a short poem usually consisting of thirteen lines: these are divided into three strophes by a pause at the fifth and eighth lines; eight of the lines have one rhyme and the remaining five another; and the first word or words of the whole poem are repeated after the eighth and last lines, but without forming part of them. The rondeau is "né gaulois" in that it dates from the Middle Ages: such forms as the ode and the epigram were copied from the classics after the Renaissance. The rondeau fell out of fashion after the time of Marot, but was brought into fashion again by Voiture.

141. The *Ballade* is a short poem usually consisting of three stanzas of eight or ten lines and ending with an "envoi" of four or five lines, the same line being repeated at the end of all the stanzas as well as of the "envoi."

143. The *Madrigal* has no fixed rules as to form, except that it must be short. It developes an ingenious and delicate thought and is usually a love poem, but is not necessarily so. Cf. Molière, *Les Précieuses ridicules*, x., "Il travaille à mettre en madrigaux toute l'histoire romaine."

145—180. *Satire.*

147. Boileau follows Horace in saying that Lucilius (167—122 B.C.) was the first satirist.

Est Lucilius ausus
Primus in hunc operis componere carmina morem,
Detrahere et pellem, nitidus qua quisque per ora
Cederet, introrsum turpis. (*Satires*, II. 1, 62—65.)

Boileau had already written four similar lines in *Satire* VII:

Eh quoi! lorsqu'autrefois Horace, après Lucile,
Exhalait en bons mots les vapeurs de sa bile,
Et, vengeant la vertu par des traits éclatants,
Allait ôter le masque aux vices de son temps.

150. It was the custom at Rome for rich men to be carried about in a litter by their slaves.

152. **Fat.** See note on I. 224.

155. **Perse,** Persius. The foregoing lines on Lucilius and Horace may be compared with Persius's first satire, ll. 114—118.

157. **Les cris de l'école**, i.e. the schools of rhetoric. Juvenal was trained as a rhetorician and practised for a long time as a declaimer before he took to satire.

161, 162. An allusion to the tenth satire of Juvenal, which tells how the senate, on the receipt of a letter from the Emperor Tiberius, who was then at Capri, disgraced and killed Sejanus who was acting for him in his absence and had hoped to usurp his power.

163, 164. An allusion to the fourth satire, which describes how Domitian (the "tyran soupçonneux") assembled the senate to consider how a turbot should be dressed.

Pâles adulateurs is probably suggested by ll. 74, 75 of this satire:

In quorum facie miserae magnaeque sedebat
Pallor amicitiae.

165, 166. An allusion to the sixth satire ll. 116 &c.

169. **Mathurin Régnier** (1573—1613) is the great French satirist before Boileau. He is the author of seventeen satires, of which the most interesting, from a literary point of view, is that in which he attacks Malherbe. The nephew of Desportes (see I. 130), Régnier was an ardent disciple of Ronsard. He had great gifts as a satirist, for he had a keen eye and an undoubted power of description, but his work cannot escape the accusation of carelessness and sometimes of prolixity. Cf. *Épître* X. ll. 99—102.

Seul parmi nous. This was not the case in 1674 when the *Art poétique* appeared, for Boileau had published his first satires in 1666,

and if any satirist ever took the Romans as models it was Boileau himself (see note on IV. 228). But the author of the *Art poétique* had wisely determined not to speak of the living (see note on III. 393).

171, 172. According to Brossette, who knew Boileau and was the first to edit his works (2 vols. Geneva, 1716), these two lines originally read as follows:

> Heureux! si moins hardi dans ses vers pleins de fiel,
> Il n'avait point traîné les muses au bordel.

The great Arnauld, according to Brossette, got Boileau to substitute the two present verses, "qui sont les seuls que le docte théologien ait jamais faits."

The criticism applies in particular to Régnier's eleventh satire; but see also the thirteenth.

Où fréquentait l'auteur: *que* would now need to be used instead of *où*, as *fréquenter* is transitive.

173. **Cynique**, not "cynical" but "ribald."

179. **Candeur**, "sincerity." Boileau enjoins sincerity in satire and accordingly shuns "impudence that preaches modesty"; but he will allow only modesty in the treatment of even immodest matters.

The whole of this excellent passage on satire is to be compared with Boileau's *Discours sur la Satire* (1668), in which he discusses the same satirists at greater length, but from a more special point of view.

181—204. *The Vaudeville.*

A *Vaudeville* is a short, gay song, usually consisting of several couplets and a refrain, and sung to a well-known air. (This is not to be confounded with what is now usually meant by a Vaudeville,—a light comedy, intermingled with songs &c.)

The older form was "Vau-de-vire": it is used in Vauquelin's *Art poétique* (first published 1605), II. l. 555. Ménage (see note on II. 14) gives the following account of the origin of the word. "*Vaudeville*, sorte de chansons. Par corruption au lieu de *Vaudevire.* C'est ainsi qu'on appelait anciennement ces chansons, parce qu'elles furent inventées par Olivier Basselin, qui était un foulon de Vire en Normandie, et qu'elles furent premièrement chantées au Vau de Vire, qui est le nom d'un lieu proche de la ville de Vire." Basselin lived in the fifteenth century. Few "vaux-de-vire" were written after his death till, in the sixteenth century, Jean le Houx, a lawyer of Vire, again popularised the form.

181. **D'un trait de ce poème**, "out of a stroke of satire": i.e. the *vaudeville* is a satirical sally converted into a song.

Bons mots. See note on II. 104.

183. **Agréable indiscret**: "agréable" because it is lively and catching, "indiscret" because it often tends to be libellous. Cf. Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, 4: "Elle entendait de tous côtés ces chansons et ces vaudevilles, monuments de plaisanterie et de malignité."

190. **Conduisent le plaisant à la Grève.** This is an allusion to Claude Le Petit, the author of *La Chronique scandaleuse ou Paris ridicule* (written about 1655, published posthumously in 1668), who was hanged and burned in 1665 for his irreligious poetry. *La Grève* was the public execution ground: it was on the banks of the Seine, by the side of the Hôtel de Ville. (*Grève* means literally a "bank" or "strand"; it has also the meaning of a "strike," as workmen used to wait in *La Grève* for employment.)

194. **François Payot de Linière** (1628—1704) won an early reputation by his epigrams and satirical songs. Boileau refers to him, more or less approvingly, in *Satire* IX. ll. 235, 236:

> Mais lorsque Chapelain met une œuvre en lumière,
> Chaque lecteur d'abord lui devient un Linière.

But in *Épître* VII. l. 89 he calls him "le poète idiot de Senlis."

196. **Enfumer.** The "fumes" of pride are here spoken of by analogy to those of wine.

202. **Rêveries**, "ravings."

204. **Robert Nanteuil** (1623—1678), the great engraver of the earlier part of the reign of Louis XIV. His work consists almost entirely of portraits.

Boileau had intended to finish the canto with the following couplet:

> Et dans l'Académie, orné d'un nouveau lustre,
> Il fournira bientôt un quarantième illustre.

But out of regard to the Academy he substituted the couplet which now appears in the text. He was elected to the Academy only in 1684.

CANTO III.

[The third canto deals with the special laws of the longer poems,—tragedy, the epic, and comedy.]

1—159. *Tragedy.*

1, 2. **Il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux**
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux.

Boileau here follows the opinion of Aristotle in his *Poetics* (ch. IV.):

"Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with absolute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble beasts and of dead bodies." Cf. also the *Rhetoric* I. 11. "Ce quatrième chapitre de la *Poétique* d'Aristote se retrouve presque tout entier dans Boileau," says Voltaire (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. "Aristote").

These lines must not be taken in themselves as expressing Boileau's doctrine of naturalism. He was far from approving an imitation of nature in its entirety, as may be seen from other verses in his *Art poétique*, e.g. l. 48 *infra*. His mission was twofold: he preached the return to nature and the worship of reason. Hence his doctrine of naturalism consisted in the imitation only of "la nature raisonnable," and in this "le plus affreux objet" could not possibly be included.

6, 7. The former reference is to the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles, in which Oedipus, on learning that he has killed his father and married his mother, puts out his eyes; the latter reference is to the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus or the *Orestes* of Euripides, the subject of both of these plays being the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies after he has avenged the death of his father Agamemnon by killing his mother Clytaemnestra.

8. **Divertir**, to "divert the attention," not to "amuse," is here equivalent to the modern *distraire*; it is now obsolete in this sense.

11. **Étaler** is generally used of "exposing for sale," but here, as also in l. 365 of this canto, it has the meaning of "presenting at the theatre." Cf. Corneille's *Examen du Cid* (1660): "Je ferais scrupule d'en étaler de pareilles à l'avenir sur notre théâtre."

15, 16. Cf. Horace, *Epistles*, II. I. 211, 212:

Meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet.

17. **Agréable** is explained by ll. 2 and 3. The "fureur" can be pleasing only if it is successfully "imitée par l'art." The *beau mouvement* expresses the idea of action as opposed to narrative.

18, 19. Boileau here works in ingeniously the Aristotelian doctrine that every true tragedy must arouse the feelings of pity and terror. "Tragedy," says Aristotle, "is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude;...in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper *katharsis*, or purgation, of these emotions" (*Poetics*, VI. Mr Butcher's translation). It will be noted that Boileau does not refer at all to the doctrine of *katharsis*, which is really the important point in Aristotle's definition. Corneille deals with it, though unsuccessfully, in his *Discours de la*

Tragédie, and Racine expounds it shortly in his MS. notes on the *Poetics*; but a better explanation is found in Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes* (published in 1671, three years before Boileau's *Art poétique*): "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath ever been held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions,—that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so, in physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours."

20. **Une scène savante,** "a clever scene,"—the usual meaning of *savant* in the *Art poétique* (see IV. ll. 2 and 87). Cf. the English "knowing" in such phrases as "a knowing man."

22. Note that the pause in this line is after the fourth syllable: the long and slow second half is an "echo of the sense."

24. Allusion is probably made here to Corneille's *Othon* (1664), which has too much "rhetoric" and "cold reasoning" and too little "passion"; and in ll. 29—32 to the *Héraclius* (1647) of the same author.

26. **Ressorts** literally means "springs," but here little more than "methods." Cf. Racine's *Esther*, I. 1:

Par quels secrets ressorts, par quel enchaînement
Le ciel a-t-il conduit ce grand événement?

Attacher, likewise, is only a strong word for "interest" or "please," though it gives the idea of the attention being firmly fixed. Cf. Rousseau, *Confessions*, I: "Un enfant qu'à six ans les romans attachent."

33. **Déclinât son nom,** "stated his name exactly": literally "went over the declension of his name." Cf. Scarron, *Virgile travesti*,

Homme de renom,
Qui savait décliner son nom.

Boileau added in a foot-note "Il y a de pareils exemples dans Euripide." Agamemnon states his name in the first line of Racine's *Iphigénie*.

38—46. These nine lines express the doctrine of the three unities of action, time, and place. Briefly stated, these rules enjoined that there should be only one action or plot in a play, that the action should take place entirely within the space of twenty-four hours, and that the scene of the action should be the same throughout the play. Aristotle had formulated in his *Poetics* the unity of action. Of the unity of time he

had said merely that "tragedy endeavours as far as possible to confine its action within the limits of a single revolution of the sun, or nearly so" (ch. v.), while of the unity of place he had said nothing. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century critics made his mere statement of the usual length of time into a hard and fast rule, and added, as the logical outcome of the unity of time, the unity of place. A considerable controversy arose in France over these rules at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the classicists upholding them and the romanticists opposing them. Finally the classicists triumphed, owing largely to the influence of Richelieu, and Chapelain, his right-hand man in literary matters. From 1640 on to the beginning of this century, the sway of the three unities in France was undisputed. There is a large body of contemporary literature dealing with the subject, the most important contribution being Corneille's *Discours des trois unités* (1659). The growth of the theories of the unities has been treated in M. H. Breitinger's pamphlet on "*Les unités d'Aristote avant le Cid de Corneille*" (Geneva, 1879).

39. **Un rimeur, sans péril, delà les Pyrénées.** Boileau here refers to Lope de Vega, the great Spanish dramatist (1562—1635). Like Shakespeare in England and Hardy in France, he championed the romantic drama. Since 1606 he had been attacked by the classicists, and in 1609 he replied to them in *Rimas con el nuevo arte de hacer comedias.* "When I have to write a comedy," he there says, "I fasten up all the rules with six keys, I dismiss from my room Plautus and Terence,...and I write according to the art which has been invented by those who wished to obtain the applause of the crowd; for as it is the public which pays for the plays, it is but right that it should be served to its taste." Like Shakespeare, he often made the action of his play extend over several years (l. 40). To the severely classical taste of Boileau this could be only "un spectacle grossier." It should be noted that Boileau was quite ignorant of Shakespeare. Later on in this same canto he shows himself ignorant of Milton. The only English author to whom he ever referred was "le chancelier Bacon" (*Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, "conclusion des neuf premières réflexions").

42. **Enfant au premier acte, est barbon au dernier**, "infant in the first act, is grey-beard in the last." (*Barbon* contains the idea of the beard being grizzled.) This was a taunt which the classicists often levelled against the romantic drama. There are at least three instances of it in English Elizabethan literature,—in Whetstone's Dedication of *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (published

1595), and in Ben Jonson's Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (1598). The last of these speaks of the custom

To make a child now swaddled to proceed
Man, and then shoot up in one beard and weed
Past threescore years, &c.

43. **Nous, que la raison à ses règles engage.** This was the common profession of the upholders of the three unities and the other rules of the classical drama. Cf. D'Aubignac, who in his *Pratique du Théâtre* (published in 1657) says that "les règles du théâtre ne sont pas fondées en autorité, mais en raison" (I. ch. 4). "Fondées en autorité" practically means founded on the authority of Aristotle. He was followed, professedly at least, not because he was Aristotle, but because the doctrine with which he was credited seemed the only reasonable one.

45. Note the skill with which Boileau expresses in one line the whole doctrine of the three unities.

47, 48. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 338, 339:

Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris,
Nec quodcumque volet poscat sibi fabula credi.

Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable. This line expresses a very important point in Boileau's literary doctrine. Literally, it means that "the true may often not be like the truth"; but the context, and other statements elsewhere, show that it has a deeper meaning, viz. "whatever exists is not necessarily reasonable." For the *vraisemblable*, which is in opposition to *incroyable* and *merveille absurde*, really corresponds to the *nature raisonnable* (see note to ll. 1, 2); and the *vrai*, which is plainly meant to include both the *vraisemblable* and the *incroyable*, corresponds to all nature generally. What Boileau meant to say was that "*le réel peut quelquefois n'être pas vrai.*" For with him "the *réel* is everything that exists, no matter whether transitory or permanent, abnormal or reasonable: the *vrai* is that which exists conformably with reason." (See Morillot's *Boileau*, pp. 151, 152.) This meaning is further borne out by *Épître* IX. which has for its object to prove that "rien n'est beau que le vrai."

51—54. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 179—184:

Aut agitur res in scenis, aut acta refertur.
Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem
Quam quae sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus, et quae
Ipse sibi tradit spectator: non tamen intus
Digna geri promes in scenam, multaque tolles
Ex oculis quae mox narret facundia praesens.

52. **En le voyant**: "le" refers to "ce qu'on ne doit point voir" of the previous line. "La" has been suggested in its place, referring to "chose," but this is unnecessary.

Saisiraient, "would understand." Cf. Rousseau, *Émile*, IV: "Il y a un âge pour bien saisir l'usage du monde."

55—60. These lines deal with the construction of the plot; but Boileau prefers to paraphrase the technical terms of the dramatic critics and to speak of the *nœud* as the "trouble croissant de scène en scène" and describe the *dénouement* by "se débrouille sans peine." In l. 406, however, he says "que son nœud bien formé se dénoue aisément." The *nœud* and *dénouement* correspond to the δέσις and λύσις of Aristotle's *Poetics* (ch. XVIII.). Boileau's "se débrouille" is a literal equivalent of the latter word.

60. **Change tout, donne à tout une face imprévue**. These sudden and unexpected changes, likewise, are known by the technical name of *péripéties* (περιπέτεια—Aristotle's *Poetics*, X.).

61 &c. Boileau's remarks on the Greek tragedy serve as introduction to the longer account of the modern drama. Their material is drawn almost entirely from Horace's *Ars Poetica* (ll. 220—280).

66. **Du plus habile chantre un bouc était le prix**. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 220: "Carmine qui tragico vilem certavit ob hircum." More recent scholarship contends that tragedy (τράγος a 'he-goat' and ᾠδή a 'song') derives its name, not, as Horace and Boileau say, from the goat which was the prize of the successful chorus, but from "the goat-like appearance of the chorus who were dressed as satyrs."

Chantre, "singer," is poetical, and occurs chiefly in such phrases as "le chantre d'Ilion" for Homer, "le chantre d'Énée" for Virgil, &c.

67—70. **Thespis fut le premier &c.** Here again Boileau errs with Horace (ll. 276, 277) and confounds the origin of tragedy with that of comedy. Thespis, who flourished B.C. 536, was indeed the inventor of tragedy, but, instead of going about the country in a waggon, he wrote "for city feasts and for an educated audience."

Barbouillé de lie, "besmeared with wine-lees," the "peruncti faecibus ora" of Horace. If Thespis ever indulged in this practice it must have been at the beginning of his career, for it was he who introduced the mask. See note on l. 72.

71. **Eschyle dans le chœur &c.** Cf. again Horace, ll. 278—280. Far from Aeschylus' adding to the importance of the chorus, as this line would seem to imply, he really lessened that which it already had. Originally the chorus had been the sole performers, but its functions

gradually dwindled after the introduction of actors. In some of the plays of Aeschylus (e.g. the *Supplices* and *Eumenides*) the chorus still takes a leading part in the conduct of the piece, and this is probably what Boileau refers to here.

Cf. l. 77, which likewise implies, if only from its context, that Sophocles further added to the functions of the chorus. By his time all that the chorus did was (1) to play the part of the sympathetic witness, and (2) to become the mouthpiece of the poet and express his views on the events of the play. The connection of the chorus with the action of the play disappears almost entirely in the later plays of Euripides. "The history of the chorus in the Greek drama is a history of gradual decay."

It is difficult to understand why Boileau makes no reference to Euripides. Perhaps he thought that, if he did refer to him, he would run the risk of appearing a mere "maigre historien" (II. 76). Horace had mentioned neither Sophocles nor Euripides in his *Ars Poetica.*

72. **Un masque plus honnête** means a regular mask, in opposition to the "besmearing with wine-lees" of l. 67.

"Thespis employed masks; but these were of a very simple character, consisting simply of linen, without paint or colouring...Aeschylus was the first to employ painted masks, and to pourtray features of a dreadful and awe-inspiring character. By several writers Aeschylus is regarded as the inventor of the tragic mask, and to a certain extent this view is correct, since it was Aeschylus who first gave the tragic mask that distinctive character, from which in later times it never varied except in detail." (Haigh's *Attic Theatre*, pp. 217, 219.)

73. **Sur les ais** = "sur les planches," i.e. "on the boards."

74. **Brodequin**, the low-heeled shoe, the symbol of comedy, is here used incorrectly for *cothurne*, the thick-soled boot, the symbol of tragedy. The *brodequin* (the "soccus" of Latin comedy) corresponds to the English "sock," and the *cothurne* (the "cothurnus" of Latin tragedy) to the English "buskin." Cf. Milton's *L'Allegro*, l. 132, "If Jonson's learned sock be on," and Jonson's poem *To the Memory of William Shakspeare*, l. 36, "to hear thy buskin tread," and l. 37, "when thy socks were on."

Elsewhere Boileau uses the words in their ordinary acceptation, e.g. *Épître* VII. l. 38 and *Satire* X. ll. 389, 390:

> Mais quoi! je chausse ici le cothurne tragique;
> Reprenons au plus tôt le brodequin comique.

[*Chausser le cothurne*, to write (or play) a tragedy.]

As to the correctness of the statement that Aeschylus introduced the cothurnus, see Haigh's *Attic Theatre*, p. 224: "The cothurnus was a boot with a wooden sole of enormous thickness attached to it. According to some, Aeschylus invented the boot altogether; according to other accounts his innovation consisted in giving increased thickness to the sole, and so raising the height of the actors."

76. **Accrut encor la pompe.** Perhaps Boileau was here thinking of a statement in Aristotle's *Poetics*, ch. IV: "Sophocles raised the number of actors to three, and added scene-painting."

79. In a footnote Boileau refers the reader to Quintilian, X. I.

81. **Chez nos dévots aïeux le théâtre abhorré**
Fut longtemps dans la France un plaisir ignoré.

No greater error could well be made as to the early history of the French drama. Far from being "longtemps ignoré," the drama is almost as old as the French language itself: and far from being "abhorré chez nos dévots aïeux" it had its origin in religion, as it has always had, for the Church sought the assistance of spectacular representations to convey the meaning of its doctrines.

These lines are interesting only as another proof (see note on II. 22) of the seventeenth century ignorance of the Middle Ages. It was not till the time of Chateaubriand (1768—1848) and more especially the appearance of his *Génie du Christianisme* (1802) that interest began to be taken in them. "Grâce à lui, ce moyen âge qui n'avait jusqu'alors été, non seulement pour les 'philosophes' du XVIIIe siècle, mais aussi pour les écrivains du XVIIe et du XVIe, qu'une région confuse et qu'un temps indistinct d'erreur et d'ignorance, redevenait une partie de l'histoire nationale." (M. Ferdinand Brunetière, *L'Évolution des Genres dans l'Histoire de la Littérature*, p. 183.)

83. **De pèlerins, dit-on, une troupe grossière**
En public à Paris y monta la première.

Boileau may here be referring to a statement in the *Histoire de Charles VII* which is usually attributed to Alain Chartier, and is included in the 1617 edition of his works, but which is really by Gilles le Bouvier. On the entry of the king into Paris in 1437, says Le Bouvier, "tout au long de la grande rue Saint-Denis, auprès d'un jet de pierre l'un de l'autre, étaient faits échafauds bien et richement tendus, où étaient faits par personnages l'Annonciation de Notre-Dame, la Nativité de Notre-Seigneur, sa Passion, sa Résurrection &c." Boileau is correct in saying "joua les saints, la Vierge, et Dieu, par piété," but he is undoubtedly wrong in saying that the troop of actors consisted of

"pilgrims"; it must have consisted of townspeople connected with some religious body. He is apparently referring to the "Confrères de la Passion."

89. **On chassa ces docteurs prêchant sans mission.** The mystery-plays gradually freed themselves from their connection with the Church, and fell into disrepute. Both the Reformation and the Renaissance hastened their end. A decree of Parliament in 1548 finally condemned the representation of *mystères sacrés*.

90. **On vit renaître Hector, Andromaque, Ilion.** Strictly speaking, this is an error, for Homer's heroes were not, with few exceptions, the subjects of the early French plays. Boileau means to say that the dramatists now drew their material from the classics. Cf. the *Cléopâtre* and *Didon* of Jodelle, the *Médée* of Jean de la Taille, the *Mort de César* of Jacques Grévin, and the three Roman and three Greek tragedies of Robert Garnier.

92. **Le violon tint lieu de chœur et de musique.** "*Esther* et *Athalie* ont montré combien l'on a perdu en supprimant les chœurs et la musique." (Note by Boileau.)

Racine's *Esther* and *Athalie* were produced in 1689 and 1691 respectively.

95. **La sensible peinture.** "Sensible" has here the unusual *active* meaning of "capable of making an impression"; it usually has the *passive* meaning of "capable of receiving an impression." Perhaps the nearest English equivalent of *sensible* is "feeling."

95—102. As love is the passion which appeals most directly to the heart, it may reasonably be represented in tragedy: but if the hero is to be in love, let him love like a hero, and not like a mawkish shepherd.

This is a covert attack on *Philippe Quinault* (1635—1688), the most popular dramatist between the time of Corneille's series of masterpieces and Racine's first play. In all his tragedies,—the chief of which are *La Mort de Cyrus* (1656), *Stratonice* (1657), and *Astrate* (1664),—love reigns supreme as the only virtue, and "jusqu'à *Je vous hais* tout s'y dit tendrement." (See *Satire* III. 188: cf. also *Satire* II. 20.)

In 1670 Quinault gave up the drama and in 1672 began that famous series of librettos for the operas of Lulli on which his reputation now rests. His comedies were not as successful as his operas, but more so than his tragedies.

99. **Thyrsis et Philène.** Thyrsis is one of the shepherds in the first eclogue of Theocritus, and in the seventh eclogue of Virgil.

Philène is not so typical a name for a shepherd, for there is no corresponding name in the Latin or Greek eclogues. Perhaps it was suggested to Boileau by the rhyme.

Boileau had already expressed the same thought in *Les Héros de Romans* (1665), where he makes Pluto say "J'ai bien de la peine à m'imaginer que les Cyrus et les Alexandre soient devenus tout à coup, comme on me le veut faire entendre, des Thyrsis et des Céladon."

100. **N'allez pas d'un Cyrus nous faire un Artamène.** This is an allusion to *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (10 volumes, 1649—1653), one of the novels of Madeleine de Scudéry (1607—1701). The great Cyrus appears in it, not as a conqueror, but as the lover of the beautiful Mandane. Boileau pokes fun at it, on the same score, in *Les Héros de Romans*.

105. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 120—122:

Si forte reponis Achillem,
Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
Iura neget sibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

Moins bouillant et moins prompt, "less hot-headed and hasty." There is little difference of meaning between "bouillant" and "prompt," and the two words very often go together. Cf. lines 375, 376 of this canto, and Corneille, *Nicomède*, I. 5, "S'il est prompt et bouillant, le roi ne l'est pas moins."

106. This is a reference to the first book of the *Iliad*, in which Agamemnon refuses to give up Briseis, and Achilles weeps (l. 349) because he cannot avenge the insult which is thus done him.

107. **Marqués dans sa peinture**, i.e. brought out in the description of Achilles.

113, 114. "Il est curieux de trouver énoncé dans l'*Art poétique* ce principe au nom duquel se fera la révolution romantique de 1827. Boileau, sans doute, ne recommandait pas au poète de pousser trop loin le soin de la couleur locale et de la fidélité historique, et il eût été fort étonné s'il eût pu prévoir les conséquences extrêmes de cette règle ; d'ailleurs il ne s'agissait pas, à vrai dire, du costume et du pittoresque dont on abuse de notre temps, mais seulement de la conformité des caractères avec les données de l'histoire." (Morillot, *Boileau*, p. 202.)

115. **Clélie** was another novel (10 volumes, 1656—60) by Madeleine de Scudéry.

Boileau's friend Brossette asked for an explanation of this passage, and received the following reply, dated 7th January 1703: "Je vous

répondrai sur l'éclaircissement que vous me demandez au sujet de la *Clélie* que c'est effectivement une très grande absurdité à la demoiselle, auteur de cet ouvrage, d'avoir choisi le plus grave siècle de la république romaine pour y peindre les caractères de nos Français; car on prétend qu'il n'y a pas dans ce livre un seul Romain ni une seule Romaine qui ne soit copié sur le modèle de quelque bourgeois ou de quelque bourgeoise de son quartier...Le plaisant de l'affaire est que nos poètes de théâtre, dans plusieurs pièces, ont imité cette folie, comme on le peut voir dans *La Mort de Cyrus* du célèbre M. Quinault, où Thomyris entre sur le théâtre en cherchant de tous côtés, et dit ces deux beaux vers:

> Que l'on cherche partout mes tablettes perdues,
> Et que, sans les ouvrir, elles me soient rendues.

Voilà un étrange meuble pour une reine des Massagètes, que des tablettes dans un temps où je ne sais si l'art d'écrire était inventé."

118. **Peindre**, i.e. "de peindre," in co-ordination with "de donner."

Caton, i.e. Cato the Censor; the man who opposed the repeal of the Lex Oppia, which forbade costly dress and all luxury, could not well be called "galant": and "dameret" is likewise inapplicable to Brutus, i.e. Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Republic.

Dameret, "a dandy," "a lady's man," here used adjectivally.

119. **Un roman frivole**. It is interesting to note Boileau's contempt of the novel, in the light of its modern development. When Boileau wrote his *Art poétique*, the only novels that had yet appeared were of the style of *Artamène* and *Clélie*. Even Voltaire was to say, "si quelques romans paraissent encore, les vrais gens de lettres les méprisent."

123. **Bienséance**, "propriety." It was almost as popular a word with the critics as "vraisemblance." Cf. Addison, *Spectator*, Nos. 160 and 209: "What the French call the *Bienséance* in an allusion..."

124—6. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 125—7:

> Si quid inexpertum scenae committis et audes
> Personam formare novam, servetur ad imum
> Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.

Boileau followed Horace and never thought of the possibilities of the development of character as a dramatic motive. His position was the logical outcome of the adoption of the doctrine of the three unities (ll. 38—46), for little development of character could take place within twenty-four hours. What the classical French drama depicts is states of mind at a certain period, i.e. more or less *fixed* states.

129, 130. **Tout a l'humeur gasconne en un auteur gascon;**
Calprenède et Juba parlent du même ton.

"Gascon," strictly "a native of Gascony," has also the secondary sense of "braggart."

This is a reference to Gauthier de Costes de la Calprenède (1610—1663). He was a Gascon by birth, and he was a Gascon in character. He wrote several tragedies, but he is best known by his three novels *Cassandre* (10 vols. 1644—50), *Cléopâtre* (12 vols. 1648—1662), and *Pharamond* (12 vols. 1661 &c.). Juba, king of Mauritania, who was conquered by Caesar 46 B.C., is one of the heroes of *Cléopâtre*.

Tallemant des Réaux gives in his *Historiettes* an account of La Calprenède which offers an interesting comparison with Boileau's couplet: "Il n'y a jamais eu un homme plus Gascon que celui-ci... Les héros (of *Cassandre*) se ressemblent comme deux gouttes d'eau, parlent tous *Phébus* (the euphuistic jargon of the time), et sont tous des gens à cent mille lieues au-dessus des autres hommes." (Quoted from Prof. Saintsbury's *Short History of French Literature*, 5th ed., p. 293.)

131—4. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 105—111.

133, 134. **Altiers, fiers.** These two lines do not rhyme according to modern pronunciation, for the *r* is now pronounced in *fier*.

136. **Une plainte ampoulée,** "a bombastic wail." Cf. I. 160 n.

137, 138. **Ni sans raison décrire en quel affreux pays**
Par sept bouches l'Euxin reçoit le Tanaïs.

This is a reference to the *Troades* of Seneca, in which Hecuba begins the play by describing the seven mouths of the Tanaïs and the surrounding country, the whole description being entirely out of place. *Tanaïs* is the old name for the Don, and *Pont Euxin* for the Black Sea.

142. **Pour me tirer des pleurs, il faut que vous pleuriez.** Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 102, 103:

Si vis me flere, dolendum est
Primum ipsi tibi.

146. **Se produire,** "to come forward," "to appear before the public." The construction of the sentence is loose, the meaning being "the theatre is perilous ground *on which* to appear."

150. **C'est un droit qu'à la porte on achète en entrant.** Boileau had already expressed the same idea in *Satire* IX. ll. 177, 178:

Un clerc, pour quinze sous, sans craindre le holà,
Peut aller au parterre attaquer Attila.

157, 158. **Et que tout ce qu'il dit, facile à retenir,**
De son ouvrage en nous laisse un long souvenir.

There is no poet to whom these lines apply better than Boileau himself, for his verses impress themselves on the memory with astonishing ease. "Ce qui prouve son mérite chez tous les gens de goût, c'est qu'on sait ses vers par cœur," says Voltaire (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. "Aristote").

159, 160. **S'explique** has here got the now obsolete meaning of "se développe": cf. l. 304. This verse was probably fitted in at the last moment, when Boileau decided not to deal with epic, tragedy, and comedy in their logical and chronological order, but to speak of tragedy first. The transition is not of very great merit, and has the additional fault of being too like some of those already employed in the preceding book (e.g. D'un ton un peu plus haut, mais pourtant sans audace, La plaintive élégie &c.). The transition with which he finishes his account of the epic and passes on to comedy (ll. 333—335) is equally mediocre.

Boileau always found great difficulty with his transitions. In a letter to Racine (7th October 1692) he says, speaking of *Satire* X., "c'est un ouvrage qui me tue, par la multitude des transitions, qui sont, à mon sens, le plus difficile chef-d'œuvre de la poésie." He apparently found great difficulty also in his opening lines.

160—334. Boileau now deals at length with the *epic*. This is perhaps the most unsatisfactory part of the whole poem.

161, 162. **Dans le vaste récit d'une longue action,**
Se soutient par la fable et vit de fiction.

Is mythology the main support of the epic? And does the epic live on fiction?

"It is not sufficient to bring forward the example of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* and to rely blindly on what the ancients did. A more intelligent imitation of these very authors who are always cited would have led Boileau to quite different conclusions. These gods of Homer did not by any means, as he believed, "spring from the head of poets," but were divinities who were revered and worshipped throughout the whole of Greece: this mythology was not a literary ornament, suitable for decking out a poem, but the very religion of those primitive times, when men's imagination peopled all nature with gods, and artlessly symbolised in myths the sights they did not understand. So would not the best way of imitating Homer be to do as he has done, that is to say to celebrate our country and our God?" (See Morillot's *Boileau*, pp. 204, 205.) An academic exposition of the same stilted theories is to be found in Le Bossu's *Traité du poème épique* (1675),

which Boileau naturally considered "l'un des meilleurs livres de poétique qui...aient été faits en notre langue" (*Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, III.).

Fable has here the meaning of (1) "mythological story": cf. ll. 220, and 237. In l. 192, however, it has the quite distinct meaning of (2) "tale" or "idle story." Neither of these is to be confounded with the better known meaning of (3) "story with a moral": cf. "les Fables de La Fontaine." In more *technical* literary criticism it has sometimes the meaning of (4) "plot."

170. **Gourmande les flots**, "scolds the waves." Cf. *Satire* VII. l. 79, "Juvénal...Gourmandait en courroux tout le peuple latin." *Gourmander* is a derivative of *gourmer*, "to put the curb chain on a horse," and is quite distinct from *gourmand*, "a glutton."

171, 172. The story of Echo and Narcissus is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book III. Cf. II. 34.

177. After stating generally, in ll. 160 to 176, how the epic poet should personify the abstract qualities, Boileau proceeds to give illustrations, in ll. 177 to 188, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book I. ll. 34—156. Some of Boileau's phrases are copied from this passage.

180. **Traits**, "arrows." Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III. 1, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Contrast the meaning of *trait* in I. 16, 231, II. 181, and III. 155 and 338 ("stroke," "touch"), and in III. 370 ("characteristic").

182. **Restes** has here the meaning of "what remains of a nation, a troop, or a family." Cf. *Satire* X. 438—440:

C'est une précieuse,
Reste de ces esprits jadis si renommés
Que d'un coup de son art Molière a diffamés.

183. **Éole**, Aeolus, the god of the winds: *Éolie*, Aeolia, was his kingdom. "Here in a vast cave," says Virgil, "king Aeolus controls with imperial sway the blustering winds and howling tempests and confines them with chains to prison."

187. **Syrtes**, the quicksands on the North of Africa, corresponding to the modern Gulf of Sidra and Gulf of Cabes. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* I. 146.

189. **Sans tous ces ornements &c.** Boileau is untrue to his principles when he says that these ornaments are the life of epic poetry. Such a statement is hardly in accord with the saner doctrines on the study of nature in other portions of the *Art poétique*.

190. **Rampe.** Cf. I. 68 and II. 20.

192. Boileau himself gives the following note on this passage:

"L'auteur avait en vue Saint-Sorlin Desmarets, qui a écrit contre la fable."

Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin (1595—1676) had written the comedy *Les Visionnaires* in 1637 (see note on II. 44), but his greatest work was his epic *Clovis* (1657, in 26 cantos, reduced to 20 in 1673). None of the gods of classical mythology took any part in the action of the poem, and all the supernatural work was accomplished by the Deity and the angels and devils of the Christian religion. He defended his views on the rejection of the gods of mythology in his *Traité pour juger des poètes grecs, latins, et français* (1670), in his *Discours pour prouver que les sujets chrétiens sont les seuls propres à la poésie heroïque* (printed in the 1673 edition of *Clovis*), and in his *Défense du poème héroïque, et remarques sur les œuvres héroïques du sieur Despréaux* (1674). In the "Épître au Roi" prefixed to the 1673 edition of his *Clovis* he condemned Boileau's introduction, in *Épître* IV., of the "God of the Rhine" opposing the passage of Louis XIV:

> Et quand du Dieu du Rhin l'on feint la fière image,
> S'opposant en fureur à ton fameux passage,
> On ternit par le faux la pure vérité
> De l'effort qui dompta ce grand fleuve indompté.

Boileau feared that the mysteries of the Christian religion could not be decked out with the ornaments of poetry without loss to that simple faith and reverence with which they should be regarded. He condemned the "merveilleux chrétien" quite as much from the point of view of a Christian as of a poet. But why did he condemn the religious epic if he could approve the religious tragedy (e.g. *Esther* and *Athalie*)? And if Homer celebrated his own gods, why was the Frenchman of the seventeenth century to be forbidden to celebrate his? Boileau probably thought that God, the Virgin, and the angels would be made to play the same sort of parts as Jupiter, Juno, and the other gods of mythology. The only way he saw to solve the difficulty was to maintain the god of mythology, the "merveilleux païen"; but this meant the unpardonable error of founding the epic on pure artifice. It is an interesting matter of conjecture what would have been Boileau's views had he known *Paradise Lost* (1667).

After Boileau, the most important contribution to the question of the "merveilleux chrétien" was Charles Perrault's preface to *Saint Paulin* (1686).

198. **Astaroth** was a goddess of the Phoenicians. Cf. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I. ll. 437 &c.

With these in troop
Came *Astoreth*, whom the Phoenicians call'd
Astarte, queen of heaven &c.

See 1 *Kings* xi. 5 and 33 and 2 *Kings* xxiii. 13.

208. **Balance la victoire**, "balances the victory," i.e. almost gains the victory. Cf. Racine, *Bérénice*, II. 2: "Bérénice a longtemps balancé la victoire."

Boileau is sometimes thought to be referring in the present passage to Milton; but this is an error. He tells us himself that he was alluding to Torquato Tasso (1544—1595), the great Italian poet, whose *Jerusalem Delivered* (*Gerusalemme Liberata*) was published in 1581.

210. **Faire le procès à**, "to prosecute," is here used in the figurative sense of "to censure, criticise, condemn." Cf. *Satire* IV. l. 58.

If Boileau did not wish to censure Tasso here, he had already done so in *Satire* IX., where, in a memorable line, he made him the representative of bad taste in literature: a fool, he said, may prefer "le clinquant du Tasse à tout l'or de Virgile."

211. **À sa gloire**, i.e. to the glory of Tasso. There are frequent references to Tasso in seventeenth century French criticism, and especially in treatises dealing with the epic. Scudéry, for example, speaks in the preface to his *Alaric* of "l'incomparable Hiérusalem delivrée du fameux Torquato," and Desmarets, in all his treatises on the epic, ranks Tasso with Homer and Virgil.

213. **Son sage héros**, i.e. Godfrey de Bouillon, the hero of the *Jerusalem Delivered*.

215. **Renaud, Argant, Tancrède et sa maîtresse**, i.e. Rinaldo, Argantes, Tancred and Clorinda.

217, 218. Boileau here refers, as he likewise tells us himself, to *Ludovico Ariosto* (1474—1533), the rival of Tasso in fame, and the author of the *Orlando Furioso* (1516).

Boileau had already condemned the "merveilleux chrétien" altogether; he now condemns the introduction of the "merveilleux païen" in a Christian subject, but allows it in a "profane et riante peinture." Is this not tantamount to condemning the epic altogether?

220. **Figure**, i.e. rhetorical figure. Ll. 221—230 serve as illustrations. They are evidently a reply to Desmarets's criticism of the introduction of the God of the Rhine in *Épître* IV. See note on l. 192.

222. **Les Parques**, "the Fates." (Latin *parcae.*)

223. **Caron**, "Charon."

226. **Plaire sans agrément.** Boileau states for the second time that the mythological fable is the charm of epic poetry. Cf. ll. 189—192.

235. **Fabuleux chrétiens.** The meaning of *fabuleux* is not quite definite, though it seems to be "who employ the mythological fable in poetry." "Let us Christians," says Boileau, "continue to employ the accepted mythological fable and not make the God of truth a god of lies, as we should do if we made God take part in the action of an epic poem." (See note on l. 192.) This interpretation takes *fabuleux chrétien* as a description of what Boileau is himself. If we take *fabuleux* in the general sense of one who fashions for himself new allegories, these words would then be a description of what he refuses to be, the translation in this case being "and in our idle fancies let us not be Christian fabulists, making the God of truth a god of lies." It should be noted however that *fable* is used throughout the whole passage in the particular sense of "mythological fable," the *ornements reçus* of l. 194, and that Boileau was himself a *fabuleux chrétien* in his fourth epistle. (See note on l. 192.) The line originally read "Et n'allons point parmi nos ridicules songes."

241—244. **Childebrand**, an epic entitled after its hero, had appeared in 1666: it had the sub-title of *Les Sarrasins chassés de France.* Its author was Jacques Carel de Sainte-Garde (1620?—1685?). Piqued at Boileau's remark, which soon won the currency of a proverb, he defended himself in his *Défense des beaux esprits de ce temps contre un satirique* (1675) under the name of "Lerac" (an anagram of Carel), and tried to justify the name Childebrand by its resemblance to Achille! But Boileau's criticism seems to have told in the long run, for in 1679 the title of the epic was changed to *Charles Martel.*

250. **Louis**, i.e. Louis XIV. The flattery is strong, but quite a negligeable portion of what Boileau lavished on his sovereign. Cf. II. 64 and IV. 187—222.

Unfortunately Boileau forgets that in *Satire* VIII. he had spoken of Alexander the Great as a madman who should have been confined:

Heureux, si de son temps, pour cent bonnes raisons,
La Macédoine eût eu des Petites-Maisons (i.e. *asylums*),
Et qu'un sage tuteur l'eût en cette demeure,
Par avis de parents, enfermé de bonne heure! (ll. 109—112.)

251. **Son perfide frère**, i.e. Eteocles.

The quarrel of Polynices and Eteocles is the subject of the *Thebaid* of Statius. *La Thébaïde, ou Les Frères Ennemis*, was the title of

Racine's first tragedy (1664); and Molière is said to have written in his youth a tragedy on the same subject.

256. Cf. I. 63, "abondance stérile." Perhaps this line suggested Pope's well known couplet:

For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
As bodies perish thro' excess of blood.

Essay on Criticism, 303, 304.

261, &c. **Ce fou** is Saint-Amant. See note on I. 21. In his *Moïse Sauvé* (1653) Saint-Amant had described the astonishment of the fishes at the passage of the Red Sea:

Et là, près des remparts que l'œil peut transpercer,
Les poissons ébahis les regardent passer.

Lines 265—266 likewise satirise the following passage in the same poem.

Là l'enfant éveillé, courant, sous la licence
Que permet à son âge une libre innocence,
Va, revient, tourne, saute, et par maint cri joyeux
Témoignant le plaisir que reçoivent ses yeux,
D'un étrange caillou qu'à ses pieds il rencontre
Fait au premier venu la précieuse montre;
Ramasse une coquille, et, d'aise transporté,
La présente à sa mère avec naïveté.

Boileau returns to Saint-Amant in his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* (VI.). Taking from Longinus the motto "en effet, de trop s'arrêter aux petites choses, cela gâte tout," he remarks as follows: "Il n'y a rien de plus vrai, surtout dans les vers; et c'est un des grands défauts de Saint-Amand. Ce poète avait assez de génie pour les ouvrages de débauche et de satire outrée, et il a même quelquefois des boutades assez heureuses dans le sérieux: mais il gâte tout par les basses circonstances qu'il y mêle....Il est surtout bizarrement tombé dans ce défaut en son *Moïse Sauvé*, à l'endroit du passage de la Mer Rouge: au lieu de s'étendre sur tant de grandes circonstances qu'un sujet si majestueux lui présentait, il perd le temps à peindre le petit enfant qui va, saute, revient, et, ramassant une coquille, la va montrer à sa mère, et met en quelque sorte, comme j'ai dit dans ma poétique, les poissons aux fenêtres." Cf. also *Réflexion* X.

268—286. This passage is modelled on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 136—145.

269. Cf. Boileau's *Réflexions critiques sur Longin*, X: "l'art... veut qu'un commencement soit simple et sans affectation."

272. **Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre.** This

is the first line of *Alaric*, the epic of Georges de Scudéry (1601—1667). See note on I. 51—58. When Horace said

> Nec sic incipies ut scriptor cyclicus olim:
> "Fortunam Priami cantabo et nobile bellum"
> (*Ars Poetica*, 136, 137),

he was probably quoting an actual line, though its author has not been identified. Boileau was in the fortunate position of having an even more pompous beginning to cite as a parallel to that of the Latin poet.

In his *Réflexions critiques sur Longin* (II.) he again deals with the same subject. "Le sublime hors de son lieu, non seulement n'est pas une belle chose, mais devient quelquefois une grande puérilité. C'est ce qui est arrivé a Scudéry dès le commencement de son poème d'*Alaric*, lorsqu'il dit:

> Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre.

Ce vers est assez noble, et est peut-être le mieux tourné de tout son ouvrage; mais il est ridicule de crier si haut, et de promettre de si grandes choses dès le premier vers. Virgile aurait bien pu dire, en commençant son *Énéide*: "Je chante ce fameux héros, fondateur d'un empire qui s'est rendu maître de toute la terre." On peut croire qu'un aussi grand maître que lui aurait aisément trouvé des expressions pour mettre cette pensée en son jour: mais cela aurait senti son déclamateur. Il s'est contenté de dire: "Je chante cet homme rempli de piété, qui, après bien des travaux, aborda en Italie." Un exorde doit être simple et sans affectation....Un poème subsistera fort bien sans exorde."

274. An almost literal translation of Horace's "Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus." (*Ars Poetica*, 139.)

278—280. Horace had given, in illustration of a simple beginning, a free rendering of the first lines of the *Odyssey* (*Ars Poetica*, 141, 142); Boileau gives a free rendering of the first lines of the *Aeneid*.

283—286. An allusion to the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, which describes the descent of Aeneas to the lower regions: there he sees the "black floods of Styx and Acheron" and hears from his father Anchises the future history of Rome till the time of the Caesars.

De Styx et d'Achéron. As "Styx" and "Achéron" are masculine, the more correct form, certainly the only correct form in prose, would be "du Styx et de l'Achéron," for the article is omitted only before names of rivers, &c., which are *feminine*.

This was pointed out to Boileau by Brossette (see note on II. 171, 172), and Boileau replied as follows (7th January 1709): "Permettez-moi de vous dire que vous avez en cela l'oreille un peu prosaïque, et qu'un

homme vraiment poète ne me fera jamais cette difficulté, parce que *de Styx et d'Achéron* est beaucoup plus soutenu que *du Styx et de l'Achéron. Sur les bords fameux de Seine et de Loire* serait bien plus noble dans un vers que *sur les bords fameux de la Seine et de la Loire.* Mais ces agréments sont des mystères qu'Apollon n'enseigne qu'à ceux qui sont véritablement initiés dans son art." And yet Boileau, in *Épître* IV., had spoken of the "rives du Scamandre"! The omission of the article has been defended on the ground that to a certain extent it personifies the rivers and accordingly makes the expression more poetical.

287. **Figures**, cf. l. 220. *Égayer* is now used for the fourth time (cf. ll. 174, 200, 216) in this passage, though it can hardly be considered the most appropriate word for the subject.

289. **Plaisant** has here the sense of *agréable*, and not that of *facétieux*, which is now more common. Cf. the English "pleasant" and "pleasantry." Contrast I. 27.

291. **Arioste.** The more usual form is L'Arioste, just as the French for Tasso is Le Tasse.

Ses fables comiques refers to the episodes of the *Orlando Furioso.*

294. **Leur déridaient le front**, "smoothed their brow."

296. **Homère ait à Vénus dérobé sa ceinture**. The girdle of Venus had the magic power of giving an irresistible charm to whoever wore it. Boileau here alludes to ll. 153—353 of Book XIV. of the *Iliad*, which tell how Here borrowed it from Aphrodite.

298. **Tout ce qu'il a touché se convertit en or**. Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI. 102, 103, "Quicquid...contigero fulvum vertatur in aurum." Dr. Johnson expressed the same sentiment in his epitaph on Oliver Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey: "Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit."

304. **S'explique** is again used in the sense of "se développe." Cf. l. 159.

306. **Court à l'événement**, i.e. to the *dénouement*: the expression is modelled on Horace's "semper ad eventum festinat" (*Ars Poetica*, 148).

308. **C'est avoir profité que de savoir s'y plaire**. Boileau applies to Homer a phrase which Quintilian had applied to Cicero: "Ille se profecisse sciat cui Cicero valde placebit." (*De Institutione Oratoria*, X. Cap. I.)

311. Note that Boileau, the law-giver of the French classical school of poetry, states that a "poème excellent" is a "pénible ouvrage."

Dryden had already made a similar statement in his *Essay of*

Dramatic Poesy (1668): "Verse is a slow and painful...kind of writing."

312. **Apprentissage**, "apprentice-work," "trial-piece."

313. **Un poète sans art**. Here again Boileau refers to Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin. See note on l. 192. L. 314 may be an admission of the excellence of his comedy *Les Visionnaires*. Besides starting the controversy of the "merveilleux chrétien," Desmarets was the chief upholder of the Moderns in the early days of the "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns," his *Traité pour juger des poètes grecs, latins, et français* (1670) being the most important contribution to the controversy before the time of Charles Perrault. In this work he says that Homer is "abondant en inventions et en fictions, mais mal forgées et mal conduites" (ch. XXI.), that "toutes les fictions d'Homère ne sont qu'un long enchaînement d'extravagances" (ch. XXII.), and that Virgil is "peu inventif" (ch. XXI.); and Chapters XI. and XII. are entitled respectively "Des principaux défauts d'Homère" and "Des principaux défauts de Virgile," the first words of the latter chapter being "Virgile a peu d'invention." Elsewhere he appealed to posterity for a true judgment on his own works:

Car le siècle envieux juge sans équité,
Mais j'en appelle à toi, juste postérité.

Hence Boileau's references in lines 325—328. Shortly before his death in 1676, Desmarets addressed the following lines to Perrault:

Viens défendre, Perrault, la France qui t'appelle,
Viens combattre avec moi cette troupe rebelle,
Ce ramas d'ennemis qui, faibles et mutins,
Préfèrent à nos chants les ouvrages latins, &c.

Perrault did not forget the solemn appeal, for, twelve years later, he was to give the quarrel a new and real importance; and the chief upholder of the Ancients was still Boileau. See note on IV. 24.

315. **Chimérique**, "given to *chimères* or wild fancies," "fantastic."

319. **Lecture** has here the secondary meaning of "instruction which results from reading." Cf. Fontenelle, *Oracles*, I. 18, "Il est certain que Rabelais avait beaucoup d'esprit et de lecture."

324. **Qu'on lui dénie**, i.e. "qu'on lui refuse." This use of *dénier* is uncommon, but is found also in Racine. Thus, *Iphigénie*, I. i.

"Pour obtenir les vents que le ciel vous dénie,
Sacrifiez Iphigénie."

If *dénier* could be used regularly in this sense, it would correspond exactly to the English "deny."

325. **Au prix de** = "en comparaison de." Cf. *Satire* VI. 89, 90:

"Le bois le plus funeste et le moins fréquenté
Est, au prix de Paris, un lieu de sûreté."

Invention. What is perhaps the best definition of invention, a catch-word in both French and English literary criticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is to be found in Johnson's *Life of Pope:* "He had *Invention*," says Johnson of Pope, "by which new trains of events are formed, and new scenes of imagery displayed,...and by which extrinsic and adventitious embellishments and illustrations are connected with a known subject."

329. **Attendant que**, i.e. "en attendant que"; the "en" is often omitted in poetry.

332. Cf. *Satire* VII. 12, "n'a pour ennemis que la poudre et les vers."

333. **Laissons-les donc entre eux s'escrimer en repos,** "Let us leave them alone (literally "at peace") to their duel." *En repos* must be taken with *laissons-les*: but the position of *en repos*, separated from *laissons-les* and conjoined with *s'escrimer*, is awkward and almost constitutes an oxymoron or bull.

334. **Sans nous égarer.** Boileau seems to admit that the satire on Desmarets is hardly in keeping with the didacticism of the rest of the canto.

335—428. *Comedy.*

If Boileau's treatment of the epic is one of the poorest parts of his poem, his treatment of comedy, on the other hand, is one of the best. In his account of the Greek comedy he is indebted to the following four lines from Horace:

Successit vetus his comoedia, non sine multa
Laude; sed in vitium libertas excidit et vim
Dignam lege regi; lex est accepta chorusque
Turpiter obticuit sublato iure nocendi.

(*Ars Poetica*, 281—284.)

336. Comedy was really twin-born with tragedy, but was much later in being recognised by the state. Susarion, the earliest comedian known, is perhaps even earlier than Thespis, but public contests in comedy were not instituted till about fifty years after those in tragedy.

Comédie antique is a translation of Horace's "vetus comoedia"; but as Horace meant by this the "old comedy," as distinguished from the "middle" and the "new" comedy (see note on l. 345), the more accurate translation would have been "la comédie ancienne."

337. **Plaisants.** See note on l. 289. It is here, as in I. 27, used in the sense of *facétieux*.

338. **Traits médisants,** "scurrilous sallies."

341. **Par le public un poète avoué,** a "recognised" poet, a poet who has the approbation of the public. This refers to Aristophanes (c. 448—c. 385 B.C.), the great representative of the "old comedy." He satirised Socrates ruthlessly in the *Clouds* (423 B.C.).

343. **Un chœur de nuées.** The chorus was dressed to resemble clouds. (But see Haigh's *Attic Theatre*, p. 266.)

345 &c. **Enfin de la licence on arrêta le cours &c.** "Although the Old Comedy ridiculed every institution and everything out of which a laugh could be raised, it was above all personal. Laws to restrain this personal abuse were made at various times, in B.C. 440 and B.C. 416, and it is probable that in B.C. 412 and B.C. 405, when the democracy was gagged, comedy was gagged also; but it was only when comedy ceased to be a state institution that it ceased to be personal, and it was only when Athens lost her proud consciousness of political independence that comedy ceased to be supported by state authority. From B.C. 390 to B.C. 320, the Middle Comedy, in which the chorus disappears, relied for its humour on its representation of social life and its caricatures of philosophy and literature. Finally, from B.C. 320 to B.C. 250 we have the New Comedy, which is the comedy of character and manners." (Jevons's *Greek Literature*, pp. 243, 244.)

352. **Ménandre** (342—290 B.C.) is the chief representative of the "New Comedy." Only a few fragments of his work are preserved, and we may be sure that Boileau had never read one word of them; he knew Menander only through Terence's imitations. In reality Boileau here writes the praises of Terence and applies them to Menander.

357. **Fat.** See note on I. 224.

359. **Que la nature donc soit votre étude unique.** Although this precept is addressed only to writers of comedy, Boileau considered the study of nature the one essential for all poetry. It must be noted, however, that "nature" did not in general mean to Boileau what it now means to us, as is clearly shown by ll. 361—372. It meant human nature, man in all his varying aspects, but not the country, not exterior nature. La Fontaine seems to be the only poet of the age of Louis XIV who appreciated the country and could find in it a source of inspiration. Boileau, even more than Pope, was essentially the poet of the town.

365. **Sur une scène heureuse,** i.e. "sur la scène avec succès." *Il* is redundant, as "quiconque" is already nominative to "peut."

Étaler. See note on I. 11.

369. Cf. I. 13.

373—388. Boileau's "three ages of man" is one of the finest passages he ever wrote. It is modelled on Horace's "four ages of man" (*Ars Poetica*, 158—174), but need fear no comparison with its model.

380. **S'intrigue**,—i.e. "se jette dans les intrigues,"—is an old form.

389, 390. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 176, 177:

Ne forte seniles
Mandentur iuveni partes pueroque viriles.

391. See note on I. 359.

393. **Molière** is the only great author of the age of Louis XIV who is mentioned in the *Art poétique*, before the passage in Canto IV. (193—210) calling upon the poets to sing the praises of Louis. Boileau alluded to Racine (IV. 127, 8) and to Corneille, though unfavourably (III. 20—24, 29—32, IV. 83, 4, 129—132), but he did not name them, for he had determined to mention none of the great poets who were still living. Molière had died in 1673.

394. Boileau has been well bantered for this *peut-être*. But, even with this reservation, is the sentiment of the line not strong praise from one who was so fervent an admirer of the Greeks and Romans? Is it not even bold praise, considering Molière's reputation at the time of his death?

Louis XIV is said to have asked Boileau who was the greatest genius of the age, and to have received the reply—"Sire, c'est Molière." This is surely sufficient to dispose of the condescension which is read into the *peut-être*.

398. **Tabarin**, see note on I. 86.

399. The *Fourberies de Scapin* had appeared in 1671. In Act III. Scapin induces Géronte to be carried in a sack to avoid being found: he does not go into the sack himself. Boileau's line must not be taken literally.

400. The *Misanthrope* (1666) usually shares with *Tartufe* the honour of being considered Molière's masterpiece. Boileau had a particular interest in the *Misanthrope*, as Alceste, its chief character, had been drawn on his model. In a letter dated 4th August 1706, he says, speaking of a meeting of the Academy, "Je jouai le vrai personnage du misanthrope dans Molière, ou plutôt j'y jouai mon propre personnage, le chagrin de ce misanthrope contre les méchants vers ayant été, comme Molière me l'a confessé plusieurs fois lui-même, copié sur mon modèle."

401, 402. **Le comique, ennemi des soupirs et des pleurs, N'admet point en ses vers de tragiques douleurs.**

These lines do not seem to have had any direct application, but they condemn in advance a form of the drama which was to be in vogue in the eighteenth century—the *comédie larmoyante.* With the growth of sentimentalism, comedy became more serious, and the dramatist began to aim not so much at amusing as moving his audience. Finally, in the *Mélanide* (1741) of La Chaussée (1691—1754), the comic element entirely disappeared and was replaced by the pathetic,—"soupirs," "pleurs," and "tragiques douleurs." The English counterpart of this form of drama was the "genteel" or "sentimental comedy."

406. See note on ll. 55—60.

410. **Bons mots.** See note on II. 104.

412. The "liaison des scènes" is a very important point in French dramatic criticism: see, for example, the *Discours* and *Examens* of Corneille.

415. An allusion to the characters of Simo and Demea in Terence's *Andria* and *Adelphi.*

418. **Chansons** from the point of view of Terence's young lover,—not of Boileau. *Chansons* here means "nonsense"; cf. the phrase *chansons que tout cela,* "that's all stuff."

422. **Se diffamer** = "se déshonorer," to lose one's reputation.

423. **Plaît par la raison seule.** Boileau nowhere insists more strongly on the necessity of the rule of reason than when dealing with comedy. It is not sufficient, he says, for a comedy of literary claims merely to please: it must please *par la raison seule.* But, it may be asked, is not mirth the soul of comedy, and can mirth ever arise from the strictly *raisonnable*? Lines 424, 5 help us to his meaning. He really meant that the author must be *raisonnable* in the treatment of his characters: whether they are *raisonnable* or not in themselves is quite a different matter; and in fact they cannot be so.

427. The **Pont-Neuf** was the great place for popular entertainments such as farces and marionettes (see *Épître* VII., concluding lines). Cf. note on I. 86.

A valuable contemporary description of the Pont-Neuf is found in *La Ville de Paris en vers burlesques* (1652) by Berthod (or Berthaud):

...Rendez-vous de charlatans,
De filoux, de passe-volants,

Pont-Neuf, ordinaire théâtre
De vendeurs d'onguent et d'emplâtre,
Séjour des arracheurs de dents,
Des fripiers, libraires, pédants,
Des chanteurs de chansons nouvelles,...
De coupe-bourses, d'argotiers, &c.

See *Paris ridicule et burlesque au dix-septième siècle* (1859), pp. 92, 3.

CANTO IV.

[The fourth canto, like the first, contains general precepts on the art of poetry, with a short digression on the origin of poetry. The poem ends with the praises of Louis XIV.]

2. **Savant hâbleur**, 'a clever talker.' For *savant* see note on III. 20. *Hâbleur* (from Spanish *hablár*, to speak) means one who is given to exaggeration in his talk, but it does not necessarily imply the habit of bragging, like *fanfaron*.

6. At the time of Boileau, the doctor's art seems to have consisted almost entirely of bleedings and purgings.

7. **À son aspect**, 'at the sight of him,' 'on his appearance.'

13. **Né dans cet art**, strictly not 'born *to* this art,' but 'born in a family which practises this art.'

14. **Mansard**. There were two architects of the name of Mansard (or Mansart) in the seventeenth century, François Mansard (1598–1666), who brought the "Mansard roof" into fashion, and Jules Hardouin Mansard (1645–1708) his nephew, the architect of the Château de Versailles, the Place Vendôme, and the dome of the Hôtel des Invalides. Boileau refers to the former.

16. Boileau's friend Brossette (see note on II. 171, 2) suggested that this line was somewhat equivocal, and received the following interesting and instructive reply (2nd August 1703):—"Vous vous avisez de trouver une équivoque dans un vers où il n'y en a jamais eu. En effet, où peut-il y en avoir dans cette façon de parler:

Approuve l'escalier tourné d'autre façon?

Et qui est-ce qui n'entend pas d'abord que le médecin architecte approuve l'escalier, moyennant qu'il soit tourné d'une autre manière? Cela n'est-il pas préparé par le vers précédent:

Au vestibule obscur il marque une autre place?

Il est vrai que, dans la rigueur et dans les étroites règles de la construction, il faudrait dire: *Au vestibule obscur il marque une autre*

place que celle qu'on lui veut donner, et approuve l'escalier tourné d'une autre manière qu'il n'est. Mais cela se sous-entend sans peine; et où en serait un poète si on ne lui passait, je ne dis pas une fois, mais vingt fois, dans un ouvrage ces *subaudi*?...Ces sortes de petites licences de construction non seulement ne sont pas des fautes, mais sont même assez souvent un des plus grands charmes de la poésie, principalement dans la narration, où il n'y a point de temps à perdre. Ce sont des espèces de latinismes dans la poésie française, qui n'ont pas moins d'agréments que les hellénismes dans la poésie latine." Boileau instances a similar usage in Racine's *Andromaque*:—

Je t'aimais inconstant, qu'aurais-je fait fidèle? (IV. 5.)

18. **Son ami le conçoit,** "his friend understands him," "agrees with his views."

23. **Claudius Galenus** (130—c. 201 A.D.) is, after Hippocrates, the most celebrated physician of antiquity. He was the author of about five hundred treatises on the art of medicine. His authority was paramount during the Middle Ages, and as late as 1559 a Dr Geynes was cited before the London College of Physicians for impugning his infallibility. (The English form of his name is "Galen": Chaucer has the form "Galien" in his *Prologue*, l. 431.)

24. This opening passage relates to Claude Perrault (1613–1688), the brother of Charles Perrault (see note on III. 313), who began by being a doctor but gave up medicine for architecture. The quarrel of Boileau with the three brothers Perrault (Pierre, Claude, and Charles) is a long and intricate question, but perhaps the best note is another quotation from one of Boileau's own letters. "Vous saurez donc...qu'il y a un médecin à Paris, nommé M. Perrault, très grand ennemi de la santé et du bon sens, mais en récompense fort grand ami de M. Quinault. Un mouvement de pitié pour son pays, ou plutôt le peu de gain qu'il faisait dans son métier, lui en a fait à la fin embrasser un autre. Il a lu Vitruve, il a fréquenté M. Le Vau et M. Ratabon [*two eminent architects*], et s'est enfin jeté dans l'architecture, où l'on prétend qu'en peu d'années il a autant élevé de mauvais bâtiments, qu'étant médecin il avait ruiné de bonnes santés. Ce nouvel architecte, qui veut se mêler aussi de poésie, m'a pris en haine sur le peu d'estime que je faisais des ouvrages de son cher Quinault. Sur cela il s'est déchaîné contre moi dans le monde : je l'ai souffert quelque temps avec assez de modération; mais enfin la bile satirique n'a pu se contenir, si bien que, dans le quatrième chant de ma *Poétique*, à quelque temps de là, j'ai inséré la métamorphose d'un médecin en

architecte...Il n'avait pourtant pas sujet de s'offenser, puisque je parle d'un médecin de Florence, et que d'ailleurs il n'est pas le premier médecin qui, dans Paris, ait quitté sa robe pour la truelle. Ajoutez que si en qualité de médecin il avait raison de se fâcher, vous m'avouerez qu'en qualité d'architecte il me devait des remerciements. Il ne me remercia pas pourtant; au contraire, comme il a un frère [*Charles Perrault*] chez M. Colbert, et qu'il est lui-même employé dans les bâtiments du roi, il cria fort hautement contre ma hardiesse; jusque-là que mes amis eurent peur que cela ne me fît une affaire auprès de cet illustre ministre. Je me rendis donc à leurs remonstrances, et, pour raccommoder toutes choses, je fis une réparation sincère au médecin par l'épigramme que vous allez voir:

Oui, j'ai dit dans mes vers qu'un célèbre assassin,
Laissant de Galien la science infertile,
D'ignorant médecin devint maçon habile.
Mais de parler de vous je n'eus jamais dessein;
  Lubin, ma muse est trop correcte.
Vous êtes, je l'avoue, ignorant médecin,
  Mais non pas habile architecte.

Cependant...cette réparation, bien loin d'apaiser l'architecte, l'irrita encore davantage, &c." (Letter to the Duc de Vivonne, 1676.) Claude Perrault was the architect of the colonnade of the Louvre. He replied to Boileau, who unfortunately had helped to spread the report that he was not the architect of the Louvre, in *Le Corbeau guéri par le Cigogne, ou l'Envieux parfait.* The real cause of Boileau's quarrel with the Perraults was that they were all upholders of the Moderns. The quarrel widened, however, and lost something of its personal animosity to become a question of literary principle, when Charles Perrault (1628–1703) gave formal expression to his views in his famous *Parallèles des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688–1697). (For a full account of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns see Rigault's *Histoire de la Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1859); for an account of the principles underlying the quarrel see Brunetière's *Évolution des Genres*, Chap. IV.)

28. **Vulgaire**, common, trival, mediocre. The second half of this line is only an amplification of the first.

29–32. Borrowed from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 368–373:

          Certis medium et tolerabile rebus
Recte concedi...
                    ...mediocribus esse poetis
Non homines, non di, non concessere columnae.

33–36. In all the editions before that of 1701 lines 33–6 had been the following:—

> Les vers ne souffrent point de médiocre auteur;
> Ses écrits en tous lieux sont l'effroi du lecteur.
> Contre eux dans le Palais les boutiques murmurent,
> Et les ais chez Billaine à regret les endurent.

[Louis Billaine, like Barbin (see I. 78), was one of Boileau's publishers, his "boutique" being "au second pillier de la Grand'Salle du Palais, au Grand César."]

The change was a decided improvement, for it did away with the unhappy repetition of *médiocre* and exemplified instead of merely repeating the assertion that in poetry "there are no degrees between the mediocre and the bad."

34. **Claude Boyer** (1618–1698) passed his life in writing tragedies, the chief of which are entitled *Judith*, *Jephté*, and *Agamemnon*. He was a great butt for the ridicule of Racine and Boileau, and it is their satire, more than anything else, that has prevented his plays being entirely forgotten. He was elected to the French Academy in 1666.

Étienne Martin, Sieur de **Pinchêne**, was the nephew of Voiture and the editor of his works. He left two volumes of poems which are usually described either as "insipides" or "détestables." Boileau refers to him also in *Épître* V. 17, VIII. 104, and X. 36, and in the *Lutrin*, V. 163.

35. **Rampale** (d. about 1660) was the author of two tragedies and several poems (e.g. *Hermaphrodite*, 1639, *Idylles*, 1648). He was a good linguist and translated several books into French.

Hippolyte-Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière (1610—1663) began by being a doctor, but gave up medicine for literature. He was the author of a treatise on Dramatic Poetry (1640), and two tragedies,—*La Pucelle d'Orléans* and *Alinde*. His *Poëtique* was to have treated exhaustively, in three volumes, all the forms of poetry, but only one volume appeared, the work being stopped on the death of Richelieu. The *Poésies de Jules de la Mesnardière* (Latin and French) was published in 1656. He was elected to the Academy in 1652.

36. **Jean Magnon** (d. 1662), a friend of Molière, was the author of several tragedies: but he gave up the drama to devote all his energies to his great poem *La Science Universelle* (1663), which was little else than an encyclopædia in heroic verse. He wrote with marvellous facility: it is said that, on a friend asking him how his work progressed,

he replied that it was nearly finished for he had only a hundred thousand verses to write! He was killed by thieves on the Pont-Neuf.

Du Souhait lived under Henry IV. Nothing is known of his life. He was the author of *Divers souhaits d'amour* (1599) and several other poems, and a prose translation of the *Iliad* (1627).

Jacques Corbin (c. 1580—1653) combined the callings of poet and advocate. His chief poem is *La Sainte Franciade* (1634), but he is best known by a translation of the Bible (from the Vulgate), published in 1643. He, or perhaps his son, is referred to in *Épître* II. 36,—"faire enrouer pour toi Corbin."

Adrien de la Morlière lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He was a canon of Amiens, who in his leisure hours studied the antiquities of the district, and found time to write bad poetry.

39. **J'aime mieux.** Cf. III. 291.

Cyrano de Bergerac (1619—1655) was the author of the *Histoire comique des États et Empire de la Lune* and the *Histoire comique des États et Empire du Soleil*, works which are said to have given Swift some hints for his *Gulliver*. His comedy *Le Pédant joué* (1654) suggested one of the scenes of Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*, and introduced on the French stage the peasant who speaks the jargon of his village.

This is the only passage in which Boileau refers favourably to the burlesque: but his approval is comparative,—he chooses the less of two evils.

40. **Pierre Motin** (died about 1615) is known chiefly by Boileau's verse: yet Régnier addresses to him his fourth satire. His poems ("épigrammes," "chansons," "élégies" &c.) are to be found in the *Recueils* or Miscellanies of the time: they have never been collected. It was an early suggestion that Boileau had originally mentioned *Cotin* (1604—1682), with whom he had had a successful passage at arms, and that he changed the name to Motin in spiteful contempt: but Brossette had Boileau's authority to deny this.

43. **Réduit**, a private house or salon where people met to read or discuss their works before publishing them. Cf. Madame de Sévigné, *Letters*, "Sa maison sera toujours un réduit cet hiver."

Prompts à crier merveille refers, of course, to *admirateurs* in the previous line, and not to *réduits*. *Crier merveille*, cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 428.

46. Boileau tells us in a note that he refers here to Jean Chapelain (1595—1674). For twenty years Chapelain was engaged

on an epic poem, entitled *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, which he hoped would rank with the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, and during all this time, thanks to his former favour with Richelieu (see note on III. 38—46) and his important position in the Academy, he was considered the supreme judge in all literary matters and "le prince des poètes français." Public expectation was strengthened by the praise of friends who had heard him read parts of his poem; and when the first twelve cantos at length appeared in 1656 no less than six editions were exhausted in eighteen months. But after the first outburst of applause, when people had time to test the true value of Chapelain's work, his reputation gradually declined. Nobody hastened this truer appreciation more than Boileau himself, for he never let an opportunity slip of satirising the dull uninspired monotony of the heavy epic. In *Satire* III. ll. 178, 9, for instance, we read:

La *Pucelle* est encore une œuvre bien galante,
Et je ne sais pourquoi je bâille en la lisant.

Cf. also *Satire* IX. 203—242. The passage on the epic in Chant III. is said to be "à la fois l'éloge littéraire de Virgile et la satire de la *Pucelle*" (M. Ferdinand Brunetière, *Manuel de la littérature française*, p. 214); but it is to be noted that Boileau does not name Chapelain there either in the text or in a foot-note.

48. **Gombauld.** See note on II. 97.

49. **Consultant** is here used as a substantive.

50. Compare the Greek proverb, *πολλάκι γὰρ καὶ μωρὸς ἀνὴρ μάλα καίριον εἶπεν.* (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, II. 6. 5.)

For **fat**, see note on I. 224. The pause in this line is after the second syllable; see note on I. 105—108.

53. **Ce rimeur furieux** is Charles du Perrier (died 1692). His works have never been collected. He had greater success as a Latin than as a French poet. Lines 57, 58 are not a poetical exaggeration, for a note by Boileau tells us that Du Perrier "récita de ses vers à l'auteur, malgré lui, dans une église." The story goes that Du Perrier recited his verses during the whole of the service, and, at the moment of the elevation, drew nearer to Boileau to say,—"Ils ont prétendu que mes vers étaient trop malherbiens." Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 472–6, and Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 622–5.

59. **Je vous l'ai déjà dit** refers to Chant I. 186 &c. One of Boileau's editors remarks that it is more than probable that the *Art poétique* consisted at first of only three cantos, and that the fourth is largely made up of what had originally belonged to the first.

62. **Subtil ignorant.** "Subtil" is the substantive and "ignorant" the adjective.

68. **À sa débile vue**, i.e. "à sa vue qui est débile." *Débile*, of course, is Boileau's opinion, and not the critic's, as the syntax of the line would imply.

71—74. Boileau refers to these lines in a letter (À M....) written in 1703 or 1704. "D'ailleurs, on n'y fait plus actuellement que des critiques que je ne sens point, et qui sont par conséquent mauvaises; car à quoi je reconnais une bonne critique, c'est quand je la sens, et qu'elle m'attaque par l'endroit dont je me défiais. C'est alors que je songe tout de bon à corriger, regardant celui qui me la fait comme un excellent connoisseur, et tel que le censeur que je propose dans mon *Art poétique* en ces termes: Faites choix &c."

Boileau's "censeur solide et salutaire" was Olivier Patru (1604—1681), a member of the Academy. He was an advocate by profession, but he devoted most of his time to literature. There are frequent references to him in Boileau's letters. The following passage, for example, occurs in a letter to Brossette dated 2nd August 1703. "Feu M. Patru...était non seulement un critique très habile, mais un très violent hypercritique, et en réputation de si grande rigidité qu'il me souvient que lorsque M. Racine me faisait sur des endroits de mes ouvrages quelque observation un peu trop subtile, comme cela lui arrivait quelquefois, au lieu de lui dire le proverbe latin: *Ne sis patruus mihi*, 'n'ayez point pour moi la sévérité d'un oncle,' je lui disais: *Ne sis Patru mihi*, 'n'ayez point pour moi la sévérité de Patru.'" Patru read over the *Art poétique* in manuscript.

78—80. In the opening lines Boileau contended that art was of less importance than genius: he now says that the rules imposed by art may *sometimes* be broken by art. *À franchir leurs limites* originally read *à franchir les limites*. Cf. Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, 141–157.

83, 84. These two lines were directed against Corneille, who had a great admiration for Lucan and even preferred him to Virgil. In the introductory remarks "to the reader" prefixed to his tragedy *La Mort de Pompée* (1641) Corneille speaks of Lucan in the highest terms of praise: "...le poète Lucain, dont la lecture m'a rendu si amoureux de la force de ses pensées et de la majesté de son raisonnement, qu'afin d'en enrichir notre langue j'ai fait cet effort pour réduire en poème dramatique ce qu'il a traité en épique. Tu trouveras ici cent ou deux cents vers traduits ou imités de lui...J'ai tâché de suivre ce grand homme dans le reste, et de prendre son caractère quand son exemple m'a

manqué." See also *Huetiana*, a collection of the sayings of D. P. Huet, bishop of Avranches: "Pour dernière preuve de mon paradoxe, que les bons juges de poésie sont plus rares que les bons poètes, je me servirai du témoignage de Malherbe et de Corneille. Le premier donnait la préférence à Stace sur tous les poètes latins, et j'ai ouï l'autre de mes oreilles avec étonnement la donner à Lucain sur Virgile." (LXXIV, p. 177 of 1723 edition.) Cf. the *Memoirs of Huet* (translated from the Latin by John Aikin, 1810), Vol. II. p. 187.

87, 88. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 343, 344:

Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo.

90. **Divertissement** now means 'amusement': in Boileau's time it had the meaning of the modern *distraction*, *i.e.* 'recreation.' Cf. III. 8.

91. **Que votre âme et vos mœurs, peintes dans vos ouvrages.** This line had originally appeared as "Que votre âme et vos mœurs peints dans tous vos ouvrages." Brossette pointed out the grammatical error to Boileau, and received the following interesting reply (3rd July 1703): "Pourrez-vous bien concevoir ce que je vais vous dire, qui est pourtant très véritable; que cette faute, si aisée à apercevoir, n'a pourtant été aperçue ni de moi, ni de personne avant M. Gibert [*who happened to have anticipated Brossette*], depuis plus de trente ans qu'il y a que mes ouvrages ont été imprimés pour la première fois; que M. Patru [*see note on* ll. 71—74], c'est à dire le Quintilius de notre siècle, qui revit exactement ma *Poétique*, ne s'en avisa point, et que dans tout ce flot d'ennemis qui a écrit contre moi, et qui m'a chicané jusqu'aux points et aux virgules, il ne s'en est pas rencontré un seul qui l'ait remarquée? Cela vient, je crois, de ce que le mot de *mœurs* ayant une terminaison masculine, on ne fait point réflexion qu'il est féminin. Cela fait bien voir qu'il faut non seulement montrer ses ouvrages à beaucoup de gens avant que de les faire imprimer, mais que même, après qu'ils sont imprimés, il faut s'enquérir curieusement des critiques qu'on y fait."

Lines 91–96 are sometimes said to be aimed at La Fontaine's *Contes*. But though they may be more or less applicable to La Fontaine, it is absurd to think, considering the friendship of the two poets, that they were intended as a direct personal attack.

97. **Ces tristes esprits** refers in particular to Pierre Nicole (1625—1695) of Port-Royal, who, at the desire of the Prince de Conti, had condemned the theatre in a *Traité de la Comédie.* He cited passages from Corneille to prove that his tragedies were contrary to Scripture.

Hence the reference in l. 100, Rodrigue and Chimène being the chief characters in the *Cid*.

Pascal and La Rochefoucauld likewise attacked the theatre, and Bossuet was yet to write his *Maximes et Réflexions sur la Comédie* (1694).

100. **Empoisonneurs** is here used in the figurative sense of "corrupters of morals." Cf. with these lines III. 97.

103. **Didon**. A reference to the beginning of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*.

110. This line was considered by La Bruyère to be the finest Boileau ever wrote.

Lines 85—110 contain Boileau's views on the relation of art to morality. The three most important points to be noted are the use of *aimer* in l. 86, the use of *estimer* in l. 93, and l. 110, "le vers se sent toujours des bassesses du cœur." He does not hold that the beautiful is inseparably connected with the good. He says he cannot *esteem* those authors who betray virtue and make vice loveable, but he implies none the less that it is quite possible that their works may be poetical. If however they wish their works to be *loved* they must join the useful to the pleasant. Boileau's position really amounts to this, that art may be distinct from morality, but that in its highest form it never actually is so. Accordingly in ll. 105—110 he tells the poet to "love virtue and nourish his soul on it," for "le vers se sent toujours des bassesses du cœur." (See Morillot, *Boileau*, pp. 180—183, and Faguet, *Dix-septième siècle, études littéraires*, pp. 252, 253.)

113. **Sublime** is a strong epithet: but it here means really little more than "excellent," "noble," &c.

117. "Vainly endeavouring to rise on their tiptoes." The full expression is "se hausser sur la pointe des pieds."

121—124. Boileau carried out his own instructions to the letter. He cultivated the friendship of the leading writers of the time, and in particular of Racine, Molière, and La Fontaine; and he was a decided force in conversation. So too was Racine; but "Corneille's conversation was insipid, Molière listened much and spoke little, and La Fontaine was surprisingly absent-minded in society."

125. In the seventeenth century, writers did not sell the copyright of their books to publishers; they found instead, if they desired remuneration, a rich and generous patron. Corneille, for instance, dedicated his *Horace* to Richelieu and his *Polyeucte* to the Queen Regent, Louis XIII having refused the dedication of the latter from

motives of economy. Boileau satirises the abuse of the system in *Satire* VIII.:

> Aussitôt tu verras poètes, orateurs,
> Rhéteurs, grammairiens, astronomes, docteurs,
> Dégrader les héros pour te mettre en leurs places,
> De tes titres pompeux enfler leurs dédicaces,
> Te prouver à toi-même, en grec, hébreu, latin,
> Que tu sais de leur art et le fort et le fin.
> Quiconque est riche est tout.

No poet ever worked for glory with more single aim than Boileau himself. The only patron he sought to please was Louis; and he *gave* his manuscripts to the bookseller. Hence he could well say of himself in *Satire* IX. 59, 60:

> ...Du bruit dangereux d'un livre téméraire,
> À vos propres périls enrichir le libraire

(i.e. enrich the bookseller at the risk of his reputation as a poet).

127, 128. These lines refer to Racine, who was not in so comfortable circumstances as Boileau, and had, moreover, a family to support. He got his "tribut légitime" from his publishers.

129—132. This is another covert attack on Corneille. He is reported to have said to Boileau, who was congratulating him on the success of his tragedies and the glory they had won him, "oui, je suis soûl de gloire et affamé d'argent."

133. The following passage, down to l. 166, is imitated (and expanded) from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 391—407.

139. **Discours**, i.e. "discours orné," such as poetry, as appears from l. 145. Cf. l. 172.

143. **Insolence** = "violence," "outrage," "crime." Cf. Racine, *Phèdre*, III. 5:

> "Déjà, de l'insolence heureux persécuteur,
> Vous aviez des deux mers assuré les rivages."

147 &c. **Qu'aux accents &c.** and **qu'aux accords &c.**, are in apposition with and explanatory of *bruits*.

152—154. Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 403, "dictae per carmina sortes."

156. **Les courages** is here equivalent to "les cœurs." *Courage* is frequently employed in this sense by Bossuet, e.g. "Ce grand prince calma les courages émus" (*Louis de Bourbon*). Cf. also Molière, *Dépit amoureux*, IV. 4, "O la lâche personne! Ah, le faible courage!"

157, 158. Hesiod gives his "useful lessons" on the cultivation of

the fields and on other agricultural matters in his *Works and Days*, the Greek analogue of Virgil's *Georgics*.

159, 160. Much of the early Greek philosophy, such as that of Parmenides, was written in verse.

171. **Enfantant.** Cf. the use of this word in the passage quoted from *Satire* II. in note to I. 163, 164. Cf. also l. 197.

175. **Fuyez ces lieux charmants qu'arrose le Permesse,** i.e. give up writing poetry. The Permessus, which had its source in Mount Helicon, was sacred to the Muses. Cf. *Épitre* VI. 108, and *Épître* X. 104.

176—178. See note on l. 125.

184. **Horace a bu son soûl &c.** An echo of Juvenal, *Satire* VII. 62, "Satur est cum dicit Horatius, Euoe!"

185. **Colletet.** There were two poets Colletet, father and son. *Guillaume Colletet* (1596—1659) was one of the original members of the French Academy. He is the author of the *Traité du Sonnet* referred to in the note to II. 103—138. He passed his life "entre Apollon et Bacchus" and died so poor that a subscription had to be raised for his burial. His son *François Colletet* (1628—1680), author of *Le Tracas de Paris* (1666), led an even more miserable life, as may be judged from the following verses in his *Muse bernée*:

> Je languis, je gèle de froid ;
> En tout temps le mois de décembre
> Loge avec moi dedans ma chambre;
> Je suis toujours, comme tu vois,
> Sans feu, sans chandelle, et sans bois;
> Toujours l'indigence m'accable....

Boileau had already referred to his poverty in *Satire* I. 77-80. Cf. also *Satire* VII. 45 and *Satire* IX. 98.

187—192. Though the flattery of these lines is extreme, as is only to be expected, it is nevertheless true that Louis XIV was a patron of the beaux-arts. In 1662, for example, he made a gratuitous presentation to the sixty greatest savants of Europe (the list was drawn up by Chapelain and consisted of five Italians, five Dutchmen, five Germans, and forty-five Frenchmen) as a reward for their services to science and art. And it must always be noted to Louis's credit that he gathered around him the greatest authors of the time. Boileau had been pensioned in 1672.

196. Corneille's *Cid* was acted in 1636 and his *Horace* in 1640. His dramatic genius may be said to have been at its height from 1636

to 1643, the year of *Polyeucte*. Corneille, however, could not believe that his later pieces were in any way inferior: in an address to Louis in 1676 he says:

> Achève: les derniers n'ont rien qui dégénère,
> Rien qui les fasse croire enfants d'un autre père...
> Le peuple, je l'avoue, et la cour les dégradent;
> Je faiblis, ou du moins ils se le persuadent,...
> Mais &c. &c.

197. Racine's *Iphigénie* had just been performed at the court when the *Art poétique* appeared. Three years later, in 1677, after the representation of his *Phèdre*, he gave up the drama. In 1689, however, he wrote his *Esther* and in 1691 his *Athalie*, "le chef-d'œuvre de Racine et peut-être du théâtre français."

200. **Isaac de Benserade** (1612—1691) won his reputation by songs and love poems, the *Sonnet de Job*, and librettos for the king's ballets (1651—1681). His chief work is the *Métamorphoses d'Ovide en rondeaux* (1676). His reputation was considerable, and he was elected to the Academy in 1674; but it is difficult to understand Boileau's eulogy, of which, however, he repented on the appearance of the *Métamorphoses*. He speaks of him in a very different tone in his 1701 preface.

Ruelle, a private salon or boudoir sacred to the *précieuses*. Under Louis XIV, it was originally the habit of ladies to receive visitors in their bedrooms. (See Addison, *Spectator*, nos. 45 and 530.) The meaning of "boudoir for literary discussion" is developed from the phrase *ruelle du lit*, the narrow passage on either side of the bed.

201. **Jean Regnault, Sieur de Segrais** (1624—1701), wrote several eclogues, including the *Poème pastoral d'Athis* (1653). He was the author also of a verse translation of the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*, and contributed to Madame de La Fayette's novels *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Zayde*. He was elected to the Academy in 1662. His sayings and opinions were collected a considerable time after his death in *Segraisiana*, a book of some value in the study of seventeenth century French literature.

Boileau seems to have considered Racan (see I. 18) and Segrais the leading French pastoralists. According to *Bolæana* (§ 76), he held "que l'églogue était un genre de poésie où notre langue ne pouvait réussir qu'à demi; que presque tous nos auteurs y avaient échoué, et n'avaient pas seulement frappé à la porte de l'églogue; qu'on était fort heureux quand on pouvait attraper quelque chose de ce style, comme ont fait Racan et Segrais."

206. Cf. l. 149.

207. **Le Batave**, literally *the Dutchman*,—an allusion to Louis's victorious campaign in 1672.

208. As a last resource against Louis, the Dutch broke their sea-dikes and flooded their country.

209, 210. **Mastricht**, or Maestricht, was captured on the 29th June 1673 at mid-day, under the eyes of Louis. *Du soleil éclairés* seems to refer both to the mid-day capture and to the presence of the "roi-soleil," a title which Louis won "à cause de sa magnificence et de sa splendeur."

213, 214. **Dôle, Salins, Besançon.** This refers to the 1674 campaign in Franche-Comté. Besançon was captured in May, and Dôle and Salins in June. It is the 1668 campaign that is referred to in II. 78.

215. **Fatales ligues**, a reference to the league concluded at the Hague in August 1673 between the Emperor, Spain, and Holland. It was joined by the king of Denmark, the elector of Saxony, and the Duke of Lorraine.

217, 218. Montecuculli, the general of the allied forces opposed to Turenne, congratulated himself on having avoided a battle by retreat in 1673. Cf. Horace, *Odes*, IV. 4. 51, 52.

223. By the year 1674, the date of the *Art poétique*, Boileau had published only the first nine satires and two epistles. But the volume in which the *Art poétique* first appeared contained also the first four cantos of the *Lutrin* and the translation of Longinus.

224. **Manier la trompette**, "to write epic poetry" (cf. II. 14); *manier la lyre*, "to write odes." Boileau, however, was yet to write his *Ode sur la prise de Namur*. See note on II. 81.

228. **Du commerce d'Horace**. Boileau's knowledge of Horace was wonderfully wide and accurate, as the parallel passages cited in these notes amply testify. In *Épître* VIII. l. 87, he admits his indebtedness when he speaks of "Horace tant de fois dans mes vers imité," and in *Épître* X. l. 101 he refers to himself as "studieux amateur et de Perse et d'Horace." Cf. also *Satire* IX. 128, 277, *Discours sur l'Ode*, *Ode sur la prise de Namur* (last strophe) &c. Boileau aimed at being the French Horace. His indebtedness to Horace and the other Latin satirists was much dwelt upon in the replies of the authors whom he had attacked. See, for example, the *Satyre des Satyres* (1666) by the abbé Cotin (see note on IV. 40):

> Je dis mon sentiment, je ne suis point menteur,
> J'appelle Horace Horace, et Boileau traducteur.

Si vous voulez savoir la manière de l'homme,
Il applique à Paris ce qu'il a lu de Rome;
Ce qu'il dit en français, il le doit au latin;
Il ne fait pas un vers qu'il ne fasse un larcin:
Si le bon Juvénal était mort sans écrire,
Le malin Despréaux n'eût point fait de satire...
Horace invente bien: Despréaux le traduit.

For *commerce* cf. II. 60.

234. **Grossier** here means "unrefined," "lacking in elegance," or, in English eighteenth century parlance, "not correct."

231—236. Boileau's satire was not directed against the authors themselves, but only against their works. So he proudly states on at least three occasions:

Ma muse en l'attaquant, charitable et discrète,
Sait de l'homme d'honneur distinguer le poète.

Satire IX. 211, 212.

Dites que, harcelé par les plus vils rimeurs,
Jamais, blessant leurs vers, il n'effleura leurs mœurs.

Épître, X. 87, 88.

Je n'appréhendais guère ces calomnies, mes satires n'attaquant que les méchants livres.

Réflexions critiques sur Longin, I.

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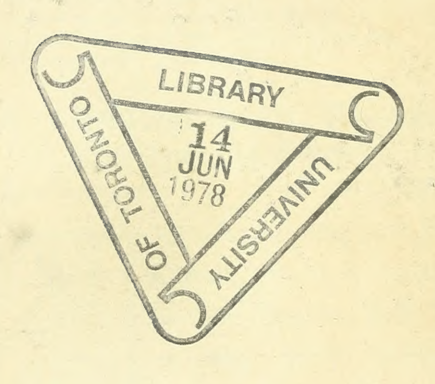
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